University of Alberta

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND SUPERVISION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is, in broad terms, about developing leadership capacity in community colleges. Contemporary literature in the fields of leadership and organization has focused on knowledge work, collaborative knowledge creation, and the need for distributed leadership capacity. Community colleges in Alberta, Canada were established based on corporate, managerial structures creating environments characterized by hierarchy, formal and centralized power structures, and traditional union/management relationships which seem to constrain development in these areas. This study explored the efficacy of participatory action research as a process for the distribution of leadership and the collaborative development of an authentic, useful model of peer supervision for department Chairs. In addition, the action research process was explored for its potential as a catalyst for change facilitated by senior administrators in a higher education institution. This study brought together a group of academic department Chairs with a senior administrator to explore how leadership, supervision, and the position of Chair can interact to produce increased leadership capacity in our organization. The action research group engaged in a series of conversations of their personal experiences, observations of their environment, and motivations for practice. The group discussed the micropolitics of the college, role conflicts and ambiguity associated with the position of department Chair, and the direct influence of such conflict on their everyday practice. The research group developed a process that involves a formalized mentorship relationship between Chairs and new faculty members for the first year of the tenure process. Through the action research process, group members became more confident in their ability to enact change in the organization and to provide leadership in their own environments. They gained insight into leadership processes and were able to adapt institutional process to support their preferred leadership practices. Overall, the study demonstrated that action research can

be applied effectively to an institution that is characterized as managerial and bureaucratic, providing an avenue for critical analysis of the organizational context, sharing perspectives and constructing new knowledge, and building relationships. It showed that action research can catalyze change successfully in such an organization.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

This study is, in broad terms, about developing leadership capacity in community colleges through the exploration of leadership roles related to peer supervision. Contemporary literature in the fields of leadership and organizations has provided convincing arguments for a focus on knowledge work, collaborative knowledge creation, and the need for shared leadership capacity and responsibility. The publication of Peter Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* in 1991 marked the growing interest in both the business world and in public sector institutions to become 'learning organizations.' Writers in leadership and organizational theory incorporated the concepts of learning and shared leadership as institutional capacities into calls for reconstructing our vision of how organizations are structured and how they operate (Alexander, 2006; Bennis, 2001; Davenport, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Ghani, 2006; Handy, 2006; Heifetz, 2004; Helgessen, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Morgan, 2006; Senge, 1996; Zingg, 2000). Core to these discussions was the concept of the knowledge economy and the assumption that knowledge management, knowledge creation, and knowledge application are critical components of successful organizations.

Alongside this interest in the 'learning organization' in the 1990s, organizational reengineering was a widespread North American phenomenon that occurred in both the public and the private sectors. During this decade organizations responded to competition and funding cuts by reducing costs, removing layers of management, and increasing efficiency. The result was often devastating in terms of the loss of redundancy and requisite diversity that Morgan (2006) claims are necessary for an organization to develop leadership for knowledge work as well as to support change and innovation. Community colleges like the one where I work were created in an era that tended to support a more business-like, managerial culture than older academic organizations such as universities or four-year colleges. As will be described later in this thesis, this culture was reinforced and became more pervasive during the 1990s as globalization and 'reengineering' for performance and efficiency took hold. This led to centralized leadership, accountability, work specialization, and competitive market-like relations within college organizations. At my college, this managerial culture contributed to disempowerment of significant numbers of individuals throughout the organization and a decline in overall leadership capacity. This became more evident as senior administrators began to recognize the difficulty that the institution had in focusing on change and innovation. Efforts made to simply assign leadership roles did not seem to help individuals to recognize their own leadership potential or to successfully incorporate collaborative knowledge development into their practice of management. This study focused on the potential application of action research to help participants in realizing their own leadership capacity, how they could enact that leadership by reshaping their practices of peer supervision, and how collaborative knowledge development could support their efforts.

The Focus—Developing Leadership Through Supervision

Working participatively with five Chairs of programs at my college, I facilitated an action research project to develop an approach for increasing the leadership capacity of our organization. I chose to focus on the leadership challenge of supervision, and particularly on the promotion of peer supervision, partly because reform of supervisory responsibility has become a priority in my college. For the purpose of this study, I define peer supervision as those processes by which faculty members observe and assess the performance of their peers and work with them collaboratively to improve their performance or to carry out various tasks related to decisions regarding tenure, promotion or termination. Peer supervision has been utilized in both formative and summative forms for the assessment of faculty performance. The extent to which this study focused on one or both forms of peer supervision was part of the development of the action research plan agreed upon by the research group.

By focusing on peer supervision, I hoped to limit the breadth of the study while concentrating on one aspect of leadership that involves collaborative effort, development of individual skills, and the creation of new knowledge in the organization. Through this process, I hoped to encourage changes in our ways of thinking and practicing as leaders while supporting change in the organization's ability to function more like a learning organization. Thus, two important aspects of the new paradigm for organization, reliance on knowledge work and increasing institutional leadership capacity, were addressed and encouraged. At my community college, which is described further on, the restructuring of the 1990s resulted in a reduction in what Davenport and Prusak (1998) termed the 'knowledge brokers' of the institution. They were the middle managers: the ones who provided time for the development of information into knowledge, the ones who carried out routine managerial functions freeing up both faculty and administrators to carry out the work of knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge creation. In addition, the past 18 years at the college saw a cultural shift that discouraged and blocked the development of leadership in the institution.

I selected peer supervision as the subject of the research because I believed this to be one avenue through which faculty can engage each other in the discussion of practice, the creation of new knowledge, and the restructuring of the institution, thus establishing opportunities for their leadership to be expressed. Levin (2001) has shown that the contemporary managerial culture of many community colleges has given rise to an avoidance of leadership activities on the part of faculty and has increased the tendency toward a culture of unionism. This is in sharp contrast to the historical culture of four-year colleges and universities where collegial relationships among faculty have promoted the distribution of leadership throughout the academy.

The Approach—Action Research

The introduction of shared leadership and collaborative knowledge work are important yet difficult objectives. The process of action research offered a promising approach toward this objective. The disciplines of context analysis, planned actions, and reflection on those actions in the collaborative processes of action research seemed ideally suited to the purpose of initiating collaborative knowledge work and shared leadership in an organization such as my college. Similarly, the practice focus of action research held promise in developing increased self-efficacy among the research group participants potentially leading to increased leadership capacity for the organization. This study explored the impact of action research, the development of shared leadership capacity and responsibility, and the introduction of collaborative knowledge work on faculty members with leadership roles and a senior administrator in an organization that was currently exhibiting many of the characteristics of a managerial culture.

The epistemology and methodology of action research enables inquiry into the factors that can assist an organization like a community college to explore its full potential as a learning organization beginning with increasing leadership capacity. Assuming that the type of knowledge work desired involves research, the following statement of Sumara and Carson (1997) is directly applicable:

> Like writers who produce literary works of art, the educational researcher is called upon to not merely report on existing knowledge but, rather, to generate new knowledge . . . find ways in which to represent not only the conclusions of

> inquiry, but, as well, the path of thinking and inquiry that has led to these conclusions. (p. xvi)

They go on to state:

> We have come to believe that any form of inquiry that seeks to learn about the complexly formed, ecologically organized relations of lived experience are, of course forms of inquiry, forms of *research.* When these forms of research are specifically organized around questions of learning, understanding, and/or interpretation, they are, in the broadest sense, concerned with education and, thus may be considered educational. When they self-consciously attempt to alter perception and action they are transformational. Any form of inquiry that fulfills these three criteria, we believe, constitutes a form of action research. (p. xxi)

This understanding of action research as an educative process suggests its potential for transforming leadership capacity within the living practice of a community college. This study was designed to begin the process of introducing "action research as a living practice" (Carson & Sumara, 1997) into the culture of the college where I work.

In preparing for an action research project, and more importantly in introducing action research as a new, organizationally embedded way of acting, learning, and knowing, it is important to understand the context in which the participants live and work. In the following section my discussion reflects my own interpretation of this context. The participants shared their own version of this story in the initial stages of the action research project, reported in chapters four and five of this thesis. My own understanding of the context shifted as a consequence of this early work and continued to evolve as the study proceeded.

The Context—A Canadian Community College

The college in Western Canada where I work has about 3,800 full time equivalent students and about 400 full-time and part-time faculty. The college is a comprehensive regional college in a small city in Alberta, Canada. It delivers programs that include adult upgrading, trades, vocational, and university studies. University studies at the college include one and two year transfer programs to a variety of provincial and other universities as well as on-site baccalaureate completion programs in collaboration with provincial universities. The public college system in Alberta has been in existence since 1957. The college in this study was established in the early 1960s in a wing of the public high school as a junior college affiliated with a single university. The legislation that established the public colleges in Alberta established a board-governed institutional structure that was more corporate in nature than the more traditional, academic universities. The initial mandate of the colleges was to provide a variety of programs and services to a specific region with a focus on teaching with little or no resource allocation to research or scholarly work. While private colleges in Alberta have been given the mandate to grant four-year baccalaureate degrees by the province for many years, the move to degree-granting status of public colleges is a very recent change. In addition, colleges have been given a mandate to pursue applied research as a core-funded endeavour. The college in this study has actively pursued both mandates in the past three years. Like most post-secondary systems in North America, the government has spent the last fifteen years developing processes for measurement, reporting, and public accountability. This accompanied a protracted period of declining public financial support for post-secondary education in the province.

My role at the time of writing is Associate Vice President of Strategic Planning and Research. When I began this study I was at first an academic Dean but for the majority of the project I was acting in the role of Vice President Academic. There was a distinct dividing line between the faculty and administration with administration holding all responsibility and authority for the supervision of academic staff. Approximately 16 years prior to this study, a new President and his appointees in senior administration made a concerted effort to reduce the participation of faculty in decision-making, responsibility, and accountability in the institution. Before that time, faculty and the appointed leaders within faculty played key roles in decision-making, hiring, evaluating, and granting tenure to faculty. I was a department Chair (a member of faculty) during that time and my experience was one of personal commitment to my students, peers, department, and college. My colleagues shared this commitment and participated in the management and decision-making of the college as a matter of course. Strong personal relationships were built that permitted the college to operate through personal interactions and informal structures as well as through the formal structures of the institution. Growing dissatisfaction with the President and his closest advisors began to emerge as the clash of values of high employee participation *versus* central control became more apparent. This eventually led to the President's departure.

At about the same time, the college grew substantially in terms of student numbers and faculty. The new President, the former academic Vice President, was very concerned with improving efficiency and in centralizing control further. This started a period of continuing erosion of the distributed leadership in the institution and a regime of distrust between faculty and administration resulting in declining employee morale.

Managerialism, the belief that goal setting, supervision, and decision-making are the responsibilities of professional managers with minor input from other organizational members, was clearly the dominant culture of the institution.

This managerial culture had developed during the 1990s and mirrored the development of managerial and business cultures described by Levin (2001) in his study of seven community colleges in the north western United States and Western Canada. One of the colleges he studied was in Alberta sharing the same context and changing during the same period as my college. Levin notes:

> Values altered, most notably shifting from an institutional framework to a corporate one. Faculty looked like and characterized themselves more as labor than in the past; administrators looked more like managers of companies. This corporate framework coincided with an economic agenda; to secure resources, increase productivity, and achieve growth. ...These colleges became more corporate, more businesslike, and less like a local college of the 1970s. (2001, p. 164)

He goes on to write:

> Corporate-style management...eroded the practice of employee participation, showing participation as an exercise in voice, not a critical component in decision-making, especially in the absence of legislative requirements for shared authority. Most employee groups took a practical and realistic view of participation in decision-making; they readily acknowledged their powerlessness in institutional decisions. (2001, p. 168)

Levin attributes the changes that he describes to the process of globalization. The values and context of an increasingly globalized economy, culture, and political system were felt in organizations throughout the world even if their contact with other nations, ethnic groups, cultures, and political systems was minimal. He described the culture of the 1970s and 1980s as a practitioners' culture and a consensus culture. These cultures "gave way to business and corporate cultures, in which economic and system values prevailed" (Levin, 2001, p. 170). Levin (2001) interprets the writing of Paul Gallagher, a former Canadian community college President:

> ...[A] managerial culture, modeled after the corporate world, is inimical to the more traditional values of the academy—such as peer evaluation and oversight—and to those values that community colleges adopted in their development—such as an emphasis upon teaching and learning and the 'open door' concept that represents a commitment to a democratic society. (p. 65)

Levin's study suggested to me that similar changes experienced by my college, although somewhat influenced by its own unique micropolitics, were also being affected by the forces of globalization and marketization.

The continued pressure toward centralized management control at my college was further reinforced by the provincial government funding reduction to post-secondary educational institutions of 21% over three years. This took place shortly after I had been appointed as the Dean of my division. In managing this financial crisis, most of the decisions were made at senior levels with little input from faculty or staff. Fear, distrust, and low employee morale were characteristic of the climate of the institution. Disempowerment of employees—that is, the loss of personal self-efficacy or power—was evidenced by the rationale that faculty often provided to justify not taking part in new initiatives. Statements such as, "they won't let me do that" or "I will never get permission to do what I want to do," or "my ideas are never supported" were typical justifications that I heard from faculty members. Faculty became more aloof from the college organization and withdrew from active participation in many college-wide activities. It became increasingly difficult to convince faculty members to become Chairs of their departments or to work on innovative projects. Following the President's departure, the climate was characterized by distrust and low morale.

With a new administration, concerted efforts were made at re-establishing the involvement of faculty in the management and development of the college. Three major reorganizations occurred over a period of six years in which additional administrative positions were lost and faculty were included in more formal management roles. The most recent of these reorganizations occurred in 2005 as this study was conducted. While joint faculty/administration committees were re-established, faculty members continued to defer to administration members for leadership roles. Efforts that I made to have faculty take responsibility for these functions met with only mixed results. The second reorganization removed direct responsibility for programs from senior administration and placed it with the faculty in the position of academic department Chairs. While the Chairs generally accepted this responsibility, their inexperience over the previous ten years resulted in uneven application of the new levels of responsibility. Faculty members remained reluctant to take on the role of Chair or other positions of leadership.

The new Chair roles did not include the supervision of academic staff as this remained the responsibility of academic Deans who each supervise more than 100 full and part-time faculty. It became clear that the effectiveness of such supervision could only be marginal at best. New hires and experienced faculty encountering serious difficulty were the only ones that received significant attention. At the beginning of this action research project, Chairs had been contributing to the formal evaluation of new hires through classroom observation but they did not perform any other supervisory duties. Chairs were also involved in all hiring committees but they did not have the responsibility to hire full-time staff. There was strong support from some members of senior administration to increase the involvement, responsibility, and accountability of faculty members in the management and supervision in the college. In this new scenario, faculty members would have the authority to act more independently within the general bounds of college goals and mandates that they had helped to establish. Such authority to act required increased accountability for their actions. Many Chairs resisted such efforts: many suggested that they were not hired to be supervisors and some suggested that members of the same union should not be supervising each other. There was also reluctance in the ranks of senior administration to simply turn over this responsibility without more assurance that the standards and accountability would be maintained. The extent to which a new model of peer supervision fulfilled the purposes of professional development and the bureaucratic requirement to demonstrate accountability were explored by the research group in this study.

Purpose of the Study

Given that attitudinal, cultural, and structural issues within the college appeared to be barriers to change, I became interested in the potential for incorporating new processes to catalyze change that would be both well supported by those involved and might be of lasting consequence to the organization. The purpose of this research project was to involve members of the college who are in formal leadership roles in an action research process to develop collaborative processes of peer supervision. It seemed to me, given the context of the organization, that the ability of the organization to further distribute its leadership capacity depended on two things. First, faculty and staff needed to be more fully engaged in the work of knowledge creation and in participation in leadership. Second, a shift needed to be catalyzed somehow in the culture of the organization to support such distributed leadership. This second aspect of the change is the most difficult since it involves the organization in the construction of a new reality, a new way of knowing, and a new way of acting. While the end products were well established, the means for achieving such goals were far less clear. Since action research is a methodology that connects these important components through a series of recursive cycles, it appeared to offer a way both to engage faculty and staff and to shift organizational culture.

The discipline imposed by the structure of action research in its recursive cycles offered a potential catalyst for change in this setting. The parts of the cycle outlined in Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) are:

> 1. planning a change,
> 2. acting and observing the process and consequences of change,
> 3. reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
> 4. replanning,
> 5. acting and observing,
> 6. reflecting and so on. (p. 595)

They state that the stages overlap, that initial plans quickly become obsolete in light of learning from experience, and that the process is actually more fluid, open, and responsive than the order of activities would indicate. The promise of participatory action research is that, where there is willing and committed involvement, it can create

> forums in which people can join one another as coparticipants in the struggle to remake the practices in which they interact—forums in which rationality and democracy can be pursued together, without an artificial separation ultimately hostile to both. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 595)

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) also suggest that:

> Through action research, people can come to understand their social and educational practices as located in particular material, social, and historical circumstances that produced (and reproduce) them—in which it may be possible to transform them. (p. 596)

Action research seemed particularly well suited to the kinds of changes that I was hoping to encourage in the college. The participatory nature of the methodology coupled with the empowerment that Kemmis and McTaggart purport to be the result of such activity matched particularly well with the goals of organizational change and leadership distribution. In addition to the exploration of leadership and peer supervision, this study also provided data demonstrating the effect that action research had on a bureaucratic organization, its potential for expanding the leadership capacity of a college and the effect it had on individual participants. A more complete discussion of action research and its relationship to this study is presented in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

The development of the specific research areas involved the participant researchers, and our inquiry focused on the following major research questions:

1. How can we collaboratively develop a supervision process that is authentic and useful?
2. What does leadership mean in the role of a college Chair and how is leadership enacted in the process of supervision?
3. From the perspective of the participant researchers, what are the benefits and drawbacks of action research in developing and implementing new administrative processes?

The first stage of inquiry involved me as a facilitator but subsequent stages encouraged increasing levels of participation and ownership by the participants in the group. The research group studied the context of the project, shared their personal knowledge of the organization and their views of supervision, and engaged in conversations leading to framing the problem, planning to act and implementation of the plan. It is in these stages of the action research cycle that the research questions were formulated by the group with resulting actions that addressed the research questions. As a researcher, I tracked the process, decisions, actions, and outcomes for the purpose of this study. In my initial research stance, I was looking for ways that faculty members could provide leadership to their peers through the processes of supervision and for new approaches to the supervisory process that could be constructed participatively by those in assigned positions of power. As the research group explored the planning context and their personal experiences with the current forms of peer review and supervision, the group determined that there were significant issues with authenticity and usefulness. The development of these ideas is reported is Chapters Four, Five and Six. The lack of authenticity and usefulness suggested here is related to the formalized, required processes of the faculty evaluation system which was often contrasted with the informal processes that were applied inconsistently in some departments in the college.

In responding to the research questions, the research group developed its knowledge of the organization by sharing their practices, experiences and perceptions with each other and by exploring the values and discourses constructing their practice to develop deeper understanding of their own and other group members' meanings. These approaches are consistent with the schema proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000): the technical level of action research is concerned with the routines of practice as individual and social behaviour and the practical level of action research is concerned with the values and discourses influencing the intentional action of practice. The conversations of the research group and the interviews with each participant researcher tended to evolve in three areas of inquiry:

1. The micropolitics of the organization and the influence of micropolitical analysis on the action research process.
2. The role of the Chair including the participants' understandings of their roles and how action research helped them to explore both theory and practice related to those roles.
3. The experiences and perceptions of participants in the use of action research as a methodology for the sharing and distribution of leadership within the institution. The power and authority relationships that constrain or enhance the participation of an administrator in the formulation and operation of an action research group with participants of lesser rank. Data were also collected about the changes that the participants perceived in themselves, in the group, and in those around them in the organization.

The participants in this study shared their knowledge in collaborative dialogue and action to develop a new supervision and tenure process that they hoped would be more authentic and useful than existing procedures. Action research allowed the participants to fully explore their understanding of the leadership role of Chairs as it related to the practice of peer supervision. Through their shared experiences in the project, they provided insight into the potential benefits and drawbacks of action research as an institutionalized approach for catalyzing organizational change. The data also provided me with insight into the issue of developing and expanding the leadership capacity of a post-secondary institution.

It was critical to the success of this study that the research group was able to construct a process of supervision that met the needs and goals of the participants and that senior management was prepared to support. Since supervision is partially a contractual matter between the collective of the faculty association and the administration of the college, the acceptance of the emerging forms was carefully considered by the research group. These factors represented potential constraints within the context of the research environment and thus important factors that could change the nature of the research question considerably.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for three areas: the development of leadership capacity in an institution of higher education, the application of action research as an administrative practice, and the development of knowledge through action research in the practice of leadership through peer supervision. The first is the contribution that this study makes to showing the potential for action research as a process to shift a managerial organizational culture relying on bureaucratic structures to a culture that utilizes and develops leadership at many levels within the organization. This study traces elements of leadership capacity that can emerge through the focused dialogic processes of action research, and illustrates certain challenges of leadership development in a post-secondary institution.

Secondly, this study contributes to the understanding of action research as a living practice in the work of administration. To date, much of the work in action research has focused on groups of teachers. Carson and Sumara (1997) base much of their contribution to the theory of action research on the participants in the teaching and learning endeavour. Additionally, Greenwood and Levin (2000) state:

> We believe that broad action research interventions in the organization of universities and the academic professions will be required to root out [the positivistic credo]. Put more simply, the epistemological ideas underlying action research are not new ideas; they simply have been widely ignored as conventional social researchers on the right and left (and the social interests they serve—consciously or unconsciously) have rejected university engagement in social reform. (p. 95)

In a study involving school administrators, Robertson (2000) carried out a multi-strand action research project. She acted as a participant in a number of action research groups of school principals as they worked on a new model of professional development. Robertson, however, was an outside facilitator and researcher and part of her research took on an instrumental focus. This study had the multi-strand character of Robertson's study but it occurred at the post-secondary level with faculty members and an internal facilitator/researcher. This study was also designed to show how further application of action research as an administrative process would be indicated as an additional option for administrators in post-secondary institutions.

A search of dissertation abstracts yielded one study carried out by Witt (1997) which involved the use of action research as the method of inquiry about action research as an administrative practice. This dissertation involved two strands of inquiry and the participants were peers. My study involved participants with differential power relationships. Witt's study found that while post-secondary institutions are institutions of learning, they often do not demonstrate the skills of a learning organization and that action research is a vehicle that can help develop such an organization. My study explored similar aspects of the organization but also included the potential for action research as a cultural change catalyst. Dissertations written in the last five years that considered action research in community colleges have continued to focus on teaching and learning. A few studied the concept of shared leadership but did not focus on the role of department Chairs in supervision of new faculty. This study focused on an action research process in a post-secondary setting that considered the micropolitics that affect practices related to leadership and supervision.

Finally, this study contributes new knowledge related to the development of peer supervision in a community college that has exhibited the characteristics of a managerial business culture. While many aspects of peer supervision are common in four-year colleges and universities, such practices are not widely applied in community colleges. Some segments of the college in this study have practiced various forms of peer supervision but the prevailing culture of the institution seemed not to support the institutionalization of such practices. This study documents the barriers encountered by the research group and the strategies that they employed in creating and promoting a new model of supervision that involves peers and develops the shared leadership capacity of the organization. This knowledge may be of benefit to faculty members and administrators in community colleges that have similar histories and cultures and who believe that increased shared leadership capacity is important to the ongoing vitality of their institutions. Levin (2001) has indicated that there are a number of community colleges that fit this context. Since the research group in my study constructed their own model as a result of their assessment of the context and their own understanding of the purpose of peer supervision, the focus on developmental assessment with only some involvement in summative assessment emerged.

This study is significant in that it contributes knowledge regarding the application of action research as an organizational practice in a post-secondary institution. It demonstrates that action research can be successfully applied by an administrator in an organization characterized as managerial and bureaucratic with results that are consistent with action research applied in other settings. The analysis of the conversations and interviews with the participants has given some insight into the changes that occurred in the research group, its participants, and in the organization as a whole. It also provides hope that action research can be used by administrators in their own institutions as a way to introduce change and innovation while overcoming the barriers that institutional culture, power differentials, and diverse values present. It demonstrates that organizations that provide the time and space for adequate exploration of meaning and understanding can build new knowledge that increases the leadership capacity of the organization to better meet the challenges of a changing world.

Conclusion

This study explores the development of leadership capacity in an organization that had embraced managerial and bureaucratic structures and processes. The calls for change in organizations by significant writers in the fields of organization and leadership suggest that, in order for organizations to flourish in the future, they must recognize and support the development of distributed leadership throughout their organizations. This must be accompanied by processes that help develop institutional knowledge that is both shared and used to continually renew and innovate as the competitive global market continues to unfold. Action research theory and practice suggest that it can provide a mechanism that incorporates both shared leadership and collaborative development of knowledge in the solution of organizational problems. It also provides the mechanism for authentic and long-lasting change in individuals and in groups. This study explores the potential for action research to bridge the gaps of existing centralized leadership and control with a desired future state of distributed leadership and collaborative generation of knowledge and its application. The study demonstrates the application by concentrating on the leadership role that department Chairs can enact through the supervision of new faculty in the community college. Their exploration of their roles, their relationships to their roles in the institution, and their practice of peer evaluation demonstrate the power of the action research process in achieving the goals of change.

This thesis documents and analyzes the action research process that was carried out with department Chairs at a community college in Alberta, Canada. This first chapter described the focus, approach, context, purpose and significance of the study. The second chapter describes the theoretical context presenting literature that informed the questions and theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Three is a review of the methodological foundations of the study, the detailed description of the research process including data collection and analysis, the limitations of the study, and its ethical considerations. The micropolitical analysis of the planning context that was carried out by the research group is presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five considers the role of the Chair and the participants' concerns with role ambiguity and conflicting expectations. Chapter Six is a review of the application of action research in this study and its potential for further application. In this chapter, I provide some discussion of the institutional conditions that would support or provide barriers to future action research applications. Chapter Seven provides the conclusions that I reached and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO:

THEORETICAL CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

This study is informed by four broad areas of literature: faculty peer supervision, leadership focusing particularly on shared leadership, micropolitics of organizations, and the role of the department Chair in post-secondary education. As supervision was the focus for the action research project in which the group participated, existing literature addressing peer supervision provided the focus for the first cycle of the action research process. The promotion of leadership as an organizational capacity is reviewed in order to provide justification for this project from two standpoints. The first is that distributed leadership is an imperative for organizations that want to be involved in the new knowledge economy where distributed leadership is a key component in the development of a learning organization. The second is that the process of action research will support the development and distribution of leadership while increasing the capacity of the organization to create and manage knowledge. Since action research is built on the premise that change is required and that the change is deliberate, a theoretical construct of change should be linked closely to the theory of action research in organizational change. As the study progressed, it became apparent that our research group's contextual analysis was focusing on factors associated with micropolitics. I have included a brief overview of the theoretical framework that I used to analyze these conversations. Finally, I review the literature concerning the role of the Chair as it pertains to relationships with peers and work of supervision. This literature was used to analyze the conflicting roles and role ambiguity expressed by the department Chairs who participated in the research group.

Peer Supervision

The exploration of peer supervision models, the context in which such a model could be introduced, and the exploration of strategies for that introduction are core components of this study. I will define peer supervision as a process of college faculty observing and responding to other faculty members' involvement in teaching, their interactions with their students, the materials that they use for teaching and the student evaluation methods employed. This observation also includes critical assessment of the observations and materials, reporting back to the faculty being observed and discussions of developmental plans or summative evaluations. Since the members of the research group were department Chairs and a senior administrator, the group decided that this project would concentrate on the formal roles of the participants.

The literature describes both formative and summative forms of peer supervision. I define formative evaluation as that which leads to developmental plans to improve the practice of those involved. The peer supervisor in this case acts as an observer, interpreter, mentor, and guide in the development of such plans. Summative evaluation involves judgment of performance for the purpose of tenure, promotion, discipline or dismissal. Since there is potential for both formative and summative components in peer supervision, I did not direct the course of this inquiry with any particular focus on either of these. The research group explored these options in light of the contextual analysis that was part of the early stages of the project and created a plan to implement a system that best fit the future focus of the study and the characteristics of the organization. Because I expected to involve the co-researchers in the exploration of the concept of peer supervision, I did not complete an exhaustive review of the literature in this field. Instead, I chose to review a few works that particularly informed the area that specifically pertained to the purpose of this study.

Writers in the field of higher education have often commented about the lack of research literature concerning the community college, peer supervision being just one of the topics not addressed. Levin (2001) provides several reasons for this phenomenon, but probably the most compelling lies in the cultures of the organizations themselves. He suggests that the managerial and business cultures of these institutions coupled with the unionization and level of training of the faculty have led to closed or guarded responses to researchers. Literature directly related to peer supervision, faculty evaluation, and formative or summative assessment in community colleges is sparse. Miller, Finley, and Vancko (2000) published a book that specifically discusses faculty evaluation in community colleges. They begin by contrasting the cultures of two-year colleges with their other higher education counterparts, four-year colleges and universities. In the case of the latter two levels of institutions, peer review and collegial participation in decisions related to promotion and tenure have had long histories. In many cases, peers are involved in both summative and formative evaluation. In two-year colleges, however, this has not been the case. Such colleges have tended to be more managerial in their structure, had more significant influence from unionization and were more corporate in their culture. The managerial culture that was described earlier in this paper and supported by Levin (2001) is evident in the following passage from Miller et al. (2000):

> The faculty is *the* major human capital of the community college, which underscores the *primary* duty of the two-year college administration in recruiting and deploying faculty to enhance the college mission and to achieve its objectives...it remains both the prerogative and the duty of the college administration to decide how best to utilize its instructional resources. Such deployment is most effective for a community college when made in the context of a well-designed and implemented plan of evaluation and development. (p. 24)

The language of the passage exemplifies the business view that community colleges have so firmly embraced. The most significant dissonance illustrated here is the contrast between the calls for ever greater levels of employee participation and distributed leadership in organizations and the efficiency required for rapid response to changing environments.

A further impact of globalization is the call for increasing levels of accountability related to public expenditure. Stein (2001) in *The Cult of Efficiency* described the prevailing view that accountability is the natural outcome of the belief that efficiency is of great value. Calls for accountability are becoming more prominent from all levels of government in response to the demands of the public in general, and more specifically from those who support the globalization agenda. Miller et al. (2000) state it this way:

> Accountability very likely will remain as prominent in the next several years as it was in the 1970s for a number of not-so-mysterious reasons, such as increasingly tight federal and state resources and continuing escalations in human and material costs. Increasing competition for public funds from other public sectors such as health, highways, welfare, and security can be expected as long as state and national budgets remain frugal. (p. 7)

Miller et al. outline a system of faculty assessment that involves student evaluation of classroom performance, Chair evaluation of teaching through classroom observation, examination of faculty members' individual portfolios, self-evaluation, and colleague evaluation. They believe that this multi-faceted approach is necessary to provide an accountable process. The role of the Chairperson is explored by these authors. They suggest that the subjectivity of assessment by Chairs must be both recognized and nurtured: "[a] prominent potential source of subjectivity lies with the Chairperson, and realizing that merely holding the title does not ensure competence as a starting point for bringing effective and efficient leadership to the process" (p. 16). In terms of my study, the important role of Chairs and the importance of the skill development of Chairs in providing for this evaluation are of paramount concern.

The importance of a comprehensive system for faculty evaluation is further described by Miller et al. (2000) when they quote Alfred, Peterson, and White who in 1992 wrote:

> Effective community colleges will implement systems for continuous environmental scanning, performance assessment, and planning at the service unit and academic department levels....three important characteristics differentiate high performing community colleges from mediocre ones: (1) reputation for quality, distinctiveness and innovation, (2) flexible strategies for delivering programs and services, and (3) systems for evaluating and improving performance. (Miller et al., 2000, p. 25)

While the culture of community colleges provides "a general acceptance of allowing students, administrators, and colleagues to evaluate classroom teaching as well as other aspects of professional performance" (Miller et al., 2000, p. 7), there is often a gap between the findings of such performance review and systems for professional development at such institutions. Faculty members are often left on their own to correct weaknesses resulting in ineffective implementation of developmental plans. Other sources of resistance include a lack of incentives for carrying out the program, a lack of streamlined process tools, uneven application of criteria, and a fear of retaliation by colleagues. In addition, performance review systems that are too complex, difficult to manage, and too time-consuming will prove too costly in human and material resources. While Miller et al. (2000) concentrate on the development of assessment of faculty performance for the purposes of accountability and employment, Keig and Waggoner (1994) determined that summative and formative assessments should remain as two distinct and only marginally connected processes. The difference between these two works may be attributable, in part, to the timing of the two publications. Keig and Waggoner did much of their work at the start of the most significant impact of globalization in colleges. Miller et al. wrote at a time when the impact was more widely apparent. In addition, Keig and Waggoner concentrated much of their work on four-year colleges and universities where, as pointed out earlier, the culture is more supportive of peer review. None-the-less, Keig and Waggoner make a compelling case for the use of peer review or peer supervision in the process of formative assessment. They outline several recommendations that would strengthen such processes. In addition, they suggest ways in which faculty could be provided with incentives to proceed with more involved and elaborate forms of peer review. The roles that different constituencies play in such review processes depends largely on the ability of those groups to provide meaningful critique that could give rise to improved performance. They suggest that faculty are ideally suited to evaluate other faculty in the areas of "course design . . . ; methods and materials employed in delivery of instruction; evaluation of students and grading practices; and integration and interpretation of information gathered from students, administrators, and self-evaluation as well as evaluation by peers" (p. 30).

Keig and Waggoner (1994) also provide some insight into the potential sources of resistance that may be encountered when attempting to implement a peer review model. They suggest that the tradition of academic freedom may provide rationale for those who do not wish to participate. There is the suggestion that peer review might somehow infringe on the ability of academics to teach what they want to teach. Since observation and samples of work are often used in peer review, there is concern that such data might not be representative, accurate, or typical. This leads to the conclusion that several observations and large samples of work would be required, thus increasing the time and work commitment of such a process.

While excessively involved and complex designs for faculty evaluation may support such claims, faculty designed programs would likely take these concerns into account. Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall (1999) provide very useful models and process instruments that help to reduce the time commitment for peer review and participation in formative assessment. They suggest that the role of faculty performance review should be solely for developmental purposes and for the purpose of quality improvement through program design. Some colleges and some faculty may not value teaching as highly as other duties such as research, community relations, or corporate service of training needs. Finally, Keig and Waggoner (1999) suggest that the lack of incentives, financial or otherwise, may be a significant deterrent to acceptance of a formative assessment model. Keig and Waggoner outline the benefits of peer review and formative assessment in four areas: teaching, student learning, faculty morale and collegiality, and tenure success of junior faculty. While not fully substantiated by research, there are indications that all four are supported by the process of formative evaluation.

From the literature it appears that the case for peer review is well supported for both summative and formative assessment. In the study that I initiated, the research group chose to include both formative and summative aspects in the proposal for a new tenure process. Miller et al. (2000) suggest that: "...the unionization of approximately 40 percent of the nation's two-year college faculty leaves the evaluation functions to Chairs and Deans because the traditional union axiom, 'brothers cannot evaluate brothers,' often excludes faculty classroom observation for summative purposes" (p. 30). Since the "union" at our college is not significantly affiliated with a larger union, and since it refers to itself as a professional association, there seemed to be some flexibility in the role definition of the Chair position even though Chairs are still part of the "union" and often subscribe to the traditional union view described by Miller et al. (2000). By focusing this study on peer supervision, this aspect of leadership was explored for its potential in increasing the leadership capacity of Chairs in the organization.

Shared Leadership

Many writers have predicted that organizations will continue to increase shared leadership—employee involvement in leadership and decision making—as a result of flattened and more democratic structures, reduced levels of management, shared leadership, more teaming, and greater emphasis on networking (Alexander, 2006; Davenport, 2001; Ghani, 2006; Handy, 2001; Handy, 2006; Heifetz, 2004; Helgessen, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Lawler, 2001; Mohrman & Lawler, 1998; Senge, 1999). Leadership role expectations in organizations of the future can be described best in terms of behavioural expectations since there is reasonable consensus that leadership will be a distributed phenomenon found throughout the organization at all levels of responsibility and manifested as an organizational capacity. It is likely that the degree to which an enterprise can demonstrate its leadership capacity will become part of the establishment and maintenance of its competitive advantage. The roles of leadership may differ somewhat at the top levels of responsibility but most leadership behaviours will increasingly be found at all levels. These behaviours include the facilitation of knowledge communities which use corporate knowledge in the process of innovation and which contribute to building corporate knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Handy, 2001; Peters, 2001; Slater, 2001; Weick, 2001). Davenport (2001) comments on a quote of Peter Drucker who in 1969 said: "a key aspect of 'management's new role' is to 'make knowledge more productive'—an unobjectionable statement today, though it seemed strange when Drucker said it more than thirty years ago" (p. 43). Senge (1996) stated: "leaders are people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organizations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings" (p. 36).

Many of the behaviours of leaders are generally viewed as interpersonal or people management skills. This was described as the facilitation of knowledge communities, attracting the best employees, the management of boundaries, team management, trust development, encouragement of innovation, and empathy (Mohrman & Lawler, 1998; O'Toole, 2001; Slater, 2001; Sonnenfeld, 2001). The characteristics of action research embody many of the behaviours described in the new leadership paradigm. Blending leadership work with knowledge work, becoming participants in the creation of new knowledge, demonstrating the spirit of learning, trusting others, self-reflection, searching for better questions, and tolerance of differing view points are all hallmarks of both the new leadership paradigm and of action research.

More specific to the field of higher education, Astin and Astin (2000) produced a report for the Kellogg Foundation that documented the state of leadership in higher education in the United States. They found that there were three models of leadership in operation: a hierarchical model where authority and power are based on formal position; an individualistic model based on status and recognition; and a collegial model based on faculty committees. They suggest that the collegial model is largely ineffective since these committees rarely produce final decisions leading faculty to "dislike their administrative work." Astin and Astin contend that there is a tradition of individualism in most American colleges that tends to value research above teaching. Research is the public manifestation of their activity while teaching and advising are very private leading to further individualism. They state that this individualism "...makes collaboration difficult because it tends to breed competitiveness" (p.6). In reviewing the collegial model of college governance, Astin and Astin (2000) found that much conceptual work is done by faculty committees as they discuss matters related to students, curriculum, faculty performance reviews, planning, and budgeting. They indicate that such discussions often become debates where faculty take the "opportunity to be critical or contrary, launch barbs, rankle colleagues, act out old grudges, or develop factions" (pp. 39-40). They also characterize the faculty/administration relationship as one of mistrust of leadership with adversarial camps and an us-they mentality. Astin and Astin believe that these characteristics are impediments to the development of transformative leadership in higher education organizations.

The view of leadership expressed by Astin and Astin (2000) is congruent with my view and the views expressed by the research group in this study. Astin and Astin state:

> ...leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change. In contrast to the notion of "management," which suggests preservation or maintenance, "leadership" implies a process where there is movement—from wherever we are now to some future place or condition that is different.

> Leadership also implies intentionality, in the sense that the implied change is not random—"change for change's sake"—but is rather directed toward some future end or condition which is desired or valued. Accordingly, leadership is a purposive process which is inherently value-based. (p. 8)

Astin and Astin characterize the individual qualities of transformative leadership as: self knowledge, authenticity, empathy, commitment, and competence. Since they suggest that leadership is a group process, they characterize transformative leadership as including collaboration, shared purpose, division of labour, disagreement with respect, and a learning environment. The Astin and Astin report is a call for higher education institutions to aim for conditions that foster transformative leadership. This research study partially accomplished some of the aims of the Astin and Astin report through the application of action research and conversation methods.

The calls for distributed leadership, knowledge management, and collaborative processes related to transformative leadership consistently involve the interaction of individuals in an organization in the development of increased leadership capacity. While much of the corporate literature describes the benefits in terms of increased competitive advantage and increasing the value of human capital, Astin and Astin seem more concerned with the creation of more meaningful work and the ability of post-secondary institutions to become more innovative in their delivery of programs. Transformative leadership is about change and commitment building strong organizations that are more effective. The analysis carried out by Astin and Astin is also exemplary of a micropolitical analysis in a higher education institution. In order to apply such analysis, I review some of the literature that pertains to micropolitics in organizations with some reference to educational environments in the next section.

Organizational Micropolitics

In his seminal work on the micro-politics of schools, Ball (1987) suggests that schools are organizations characterized by conflict and the interaction of diverse interest groups clustered around diverse values. In order to gain more understanding of the operation of school organizations, Ball concludes that educational organizations should be analyzed using political concepts. Because many of the characteristics of school organizations are evident in my college, Ball's micro-political approach seems applicable to this setting. He states:

> At times schools *are* (author's emphasis) run as though they were participative and democratic: there are staff meetings, committees and discussion days in

> which teachers are invited to make policy decisions (although the existence of such meetings is by no means a clear indicator of democratic participation...). At other times they are bureaucratic and oligarchic, decisions being made with little or no teacher involvement or consultation, by the head and/or senior management team. (Ball, 1987, p. 9)

The college involved in this study resembles his description of schools. Further, Ball describes goal diversity in such institutions as partly the result of relatively autonomous subgroups such as departments that are loosely connected in the organization contributing to a lack of coordination between the activities and the goals of actors in separate functional units. He believes schools "...to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse" (Ball, 1987, p. 19). He describes his concept of power in such organizations as:

> ... a more active, penetrating and flexible concept in this context, but the concept of power employed here is a particular one. It does not involve reference to position or capacity as such but to performance, achievement and struggle. Power is taken to be an outcome. (p. 25)

Ball's pioneer work in analyzing educational organizations using a micropolitical model has subsequently been adopted by many authors some of which have informed this study (Astin & Astin, 2000; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Achinstein, 2002; Chu, 2006; Cooper, Ehrensal, and Bomme, 2005; Miliken, 2001; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004; Reay & Ball, 2000; Krefting, 2003). Miliken (2001) for example, used micropolitical analysis to discuss change in a business school in a Belfast university. Using the concepts of power, competing interests, manipulation, bargaining, exchange, and coalitions, he is able to show how a micropolitical framework can be used to manage change and to understand more about the way that his organization operated.

Definition

I have adopted an analytical model of micropolitics that is suggested by Morgan (2006) because I found it to be particularly applicable to the conversations that the research group in this study engaged in during their planning context analysis. Like Ball, Morgan used the concepts of power and conflict in his analytical framework. Morgan (2006) states:

> ...the idea of politics stems from the view that, where interests are divergent, society should provide a means of allowing individuals to reconcile their differences through consultation and negotiation. (p. 150)

He goes on to state:

> …politics stems from a diversity of interests, and trace how this diversity gives rise to the 'wheeling and dealing', negotiation, and other processes of coalition building and mutual influence that shape so much of organizational life. (p. 156)

The definition of micropolitics provided by Blase in Blase and Anderson (1995) provides a good overview of the concept. He states:

> Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect….Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. (p. 3)

Morgan (2006) suggests that while some conflicts and power plays are very apparent throughout an organization, many are relatively invisible to all but those directly involved. He adds that, "we can analyze organization politics in a systematic way by focusing on relations between interest, conflict, and power" (p. 156). In my analysis of the research group work in this study, I used Morgan's framework of interests, conflict, and power.

Interests

Morgan defined interests as: "…predispositions embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one way rather than another" (p. 157). These interests can be related to the work that one does, to the career aspirations that one has for the future, or to extramural interests outside the workplace. Interests provide the underlying motivating factors that are known only through the behaviours of individuals and groups as they interact in organizational life. Morgan sees "…organizations as loose networks of people with divergent interests who gather together for the sake of expediency" (p. 161). Such coalitions form an important political organizational process that helps to influence the direction of the organization. Rather than a negative activity within an organization, which is often the connotation attached to 'political' behaviour, Morgan views political activity as an important way for an

> …organization to survive while recognizing the diversity of the aims and aspirations of its members. The organization often has to be content with satisfactory rather than optimal solutions to problems, with negotiation and compromise becoming more important than technical rationality. (p. 162)

Coalition development is seen by Morgan to be a way for less powerful individuals to gain power and to promote their interests. The college organization exemplifies the concepts of divergent interests, loose networks of people, conflict, and coalition building. The research group members in this study discussed many issues related to interests and built their knowledge of the organization using the concepts related to interests and coalition building.

Conflict

The natural result of divergent interests is conflict. Morgan (2006) believes that organizations usually "view conflict as a dysfunctional force that can be attributed to some regrettable set of circumstance or causes" (p. 163). According to Morgan, conflict is always present in organizations. It may be explicit or covert, related to individuals or groups, and may be structurally built into the organization. Organizations are simultaneously competitive and collaborative. Morgan states:

> Many organizational conflicts often become institutionalized in the attitudes, stereotypes, values, beliefs, rituals, and other aspects of organizational culture. In this socialized form the underlying conflicts can be extremely difficult to identify and to break down. Here again, history can shape the present in subtle ways. (2006, p. 166)

In institutions like a community college, many conflicts are institutionalized. For example, the unionized nature of many colleges gives rise to ritualized behaviour based on the adversarial model of contract negotiation. Cooper et al. (2005) describe such institutionalized conflict in a school setting which is analogous to the community college environment:

> The micropolitics of teacher supervision and evaluation have become intertwined and directed by organized teachers confronting organized management, a relationship that routinizes political activity (e.g., grievances, lobbying, striking, and collective bargaining) and makes much of the collective action predictable. (p. 114)

Because their study is directly related to supervision and evaluation, the views of Cooper et al. (2005) are all the more applicable to the college setting in this study. The historical nature of institutionalized conflict also figures prominently in the environment of the college in this study in that the move to centralize power and authority under previous administrations gave rise to a distrust of the motivations of administration and to a coalition of power in opposition to that action. This became a persistent conflict within the organization even when the senior administration attempted to decentralize power and authority.

While organizations may view conflict as dysfunctional, Achinstein (2002) suggests that conflict is an important component of a learning community. She states:

> I found that active engagement in conflict, a dialogue of differences, is a normal and essential dimension of a functioning teacher community. Conflict can create the context for learning and thus ongoing renewal of communities. (p. 422)

Achinstein believes that conflicts can give rise to challenge of the status quo creating new ideas that promote organizational learning. New norms and practices can be developed by exploring the meanings of past events. Her work involved schools but the college environment seems to share many of the characteristics of that setting including diversity of interests, conflict related to that diversity, concentration on teaching and learning, and a unionized environment. She goes on to state that conflict, border politics, and ideology are:

> ...micropolitical processes...because they describe the political activity of teachers as they negotiate differences among colleagues, define which ideas and members belong to their community, and make meaning of their share of the framework of values in relation to their school context. (Achinstein, 2002, p. 424)

This view of conflict provides additional insight into the essential role that it can play in the micropolitical context of an organization and the positive role that it can have in learning and knowledge development.

Power

Power is the most well developed aspect of Morgan's (2006) discussion of organizational micropolitics. He states: "Power is the medium through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved. Power influences who gets what, when, and how" (p. 166). Morgan uses Robert Dahl's definition of power: "...power involves an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done" (Morgan, 2006, p. 166). Of the 14 sources of power that Morgan describes, I will review only those that particularly pertain to the analysis that the research group did in conducting this action research project including: formal authority; the use of organizational structure, rules, regulations, and procedures; control of decision processes; control of knowledge and information; control of counterorganizations; gender and management of gender issues; and structural factors that define the stage of action.

Formal authority and use of structure, rules, and regulations. According to Morgan (2006), formal authority is probably the most obvious form of power in a managerial culture. This power arises from delegation from one's superior and defines the parameters for action in resource allocation, personnel issues, or setting regulations for institutional activity. Department Chairs in colleges hold such power as suggested by Chu (2006): "Chairs need to recognize that their positions as the legal head of the department make them, by definition, holders of greater power and authority than their peers" (p. 36). Similarly, the use of organizational structure, rules, regulations, and procedures may be used as a political instrument particularly in bureaucratic, managerial organizations. Morgan (2006) states that:

> People and departments often cling to outdated job descriptions and resist change because their power and status within the organization are so closely tied with the old order....Many organizations have comprehensive systems of rules that, as almost every employee knows, can never be applied if the system is to achieve any degree of operational effectiveness....Although their formal purpose may be to protect employees, customers, or the public at large, [rules] also are there to protect their creators....Rules and regulations are often created, invoked, and used in either a proactive or retrospective fashion as part of a power play. (p. 173)

Because the participants in this study were all experienced department Chairs, all were keenly aware of both sources of power—formal authority and the use of structure, rules and regulations. Because community colleges historically were created using bureaucratic and managerial organizational models, both formal authority and structural power sources still figure prominently in their political activities.

Control of processes and information. Two related sources of power involve the control of processes and information. The first is the control of decision processes where the initial issues and objectives, the evaluative criteria, and the preparation of background information are all specified by the person or group requiring the decision. Morgan states:

> Eloquence, command of the facts, passionate commitment, or sheer tenacity or endurance can in the end win the day, adding to a person's power to influence the decision with which he or she is involved. (2006, p. 174)

One such example of the use of this source of power is suggested by Cooper et al. (2005) when they describe the use of committees in schools to allow participants to voice their concerns but the "formal setting and hierarchical structures limit participants' voices, reducing participation to a symbolic gesture" (p. 116). They go on to state that Principals can channel dissent by setting agendas, chairing, and staffing the meetings of committees. Ball (1987) refers to this as non-decision making in that the power of those in authority successfully prevents those in opposition from gaining any power. I have observed and participated in such activities in our college. The second and related source of power is the control of information and knowledge. Morgan (2006) views this as a means of creating "patterns of dependency." Thus only the information and knowledge that supports a particular point of view is allowed to be disseminated in an organization. The gatekeeper of the information systems becomes very powerful as a result.

Interpersonal relationships. Relationships such as interpersonal alliances, networks, and control of the informal organization are seen as keys to informal power according to Morgan (2006):

> Friends in high places, sponsors, mentors, ethnic or cultural affiliations, coalitions of people prepared to trade support and favours to further their individual ends, and informal networks for touching base, sounding out, or merely shooting the breeze—all provide a source of power to those involved. (p. 181)

The participatory nature of this action research study suggests that this source of power would figure prominently in the research group's activities and figure into the strategies developed for their implementation plan. This is an important source of personal power for Chairs in the absence of authority delegated through organizational structures.

Counterorganizations. The control of counterorganizations is the development of a power bloc that opposes the build up of power in the hands of a few people within an organization (Morgan, 2006). Trade unions, according to Morgan, are the most obvious of these. This is seen as a way of balancing power relations "where one is not part of the established power structure" (p. 183). Morgan goes on to state that, "For many people at the lower levels or marginalized areas of an organization, the only effective way that they can influence their work life is through this form of countervailing power" (p. 183). At our college there are three collective bargaining units. While only one of these bears the title 'union', they all are responsible for negotiating collective agreements and for monitoring the working conditions of their members. The faculty association at our college could be characterized as a counterorganization especially if the increasing centralization of authority that had occurred for many years is considered.

Gender-related power. Gender and the management of gender relations is seen by Morgan (2006) as an important source of power in organizations. The dominance of gender-related values that bias organizational life may favour one sex over another. Morgan states that this bias "...not only gives rise to limited opportunity at the top of an organization but also "...shape[s] how organizational reality is created and sustained on a day-to-day basis" (p. 186). Morgan lists the male stereotypical characteristics of organization as: logical, rational, aggressive, exploitative, strategic, independent, competitive, with powerful individuals being leaders and decision makers. He lists the female stereotypes as: intuitive, emotional, submissive, empathic, spontaneous, nurturing, cooperative, with typical individuals being loyal supporters and followers. The organizational discourse of the college in this study can be characterized as male-oriented. A typical example is related to a recent college-wide strategic planning initiative that is aimed at gaining competitive advantage in gaining additional resources to grow the college. Like Morgan's assessment of male-oriented organizations, our college is "...encouraged to be rational, analytical, strategic, decision-oriented, tough, and aggressive..." (p. 186). As gender and equal opportunity issues are currently in focus, women are now being encouraged to:

> ...change the rules of the game. Switch the archetype. In a networked as opposed to hierarchical world, new skills and competencies are needed. The characteristics of the female archetype have much to offer here. (Morgan, 2006, p. 188)

The gendered nature of the college and the pressures being placed on it in terms of greater calls for accountability, strategic planning, and competition are important aspects of the planning context for this study and provide a framework to analyze some of the activities of the research group.

Reay and Ball (2000) contend that recent efforts to feminize management practices have not had substantial impact on educational institutions. They suggest that, "...the introduction of the market form, has had the effect of legitimating and encouraging assertive, instrumental and competitive behaviour" (p. 147). According to Reay and Ball (2000) women in senior positions in educational institutions have had to "develop more masculine ways of interacting in order to be seen as authentic leaders" (p. 147). Strong leaders in education are not noted as team players but as strong managers highlighted by the qualities of efficiency, accountability, ambition, and competition. Masculine values are thus perpetuated, they argue, by this new form of patriarchy centered on managerialism. In this environment, democratic decision making, consultation, and participation are less prominent. Reay and Ball (2000) argue that more feminine approaches to management include power-sharing teams, stressing "power for" rather than "power over" more junior staff. They also argue that the traditional role of mother has been an adaptation that many women have applied in their roles of management. In that role, censor, discipline, and control co-exist with listening, comforting, "...training, and hiding as the person 'who knows best' "(p. 152). They conclude:

> [women] are expected to lead and still remain an equal; to be tough and simultaneously kind and nurturant. Pragmatic adaptation inevitably follows. This brings us back to women drawing on a subject position as 'mother' in order to be seen as 'authentically, acceptably powerful' and this may work to sift out women more clearly displaying feminine styles or those committed to feminist ideologies. (p. 152)

Reay and Ball provide an interesting source of debate regarding the feminine adaptations to the masculine organizational environment in which they find themselves.

My research study provides some evidence that our research group was wrestling with these concepts without explicit mention of gender or its related issues. There is strong evidence that educational institutions seem to have remained strongly gender-biased and that power is associated with management approaches that fit the masculine dominated environment. Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) provide a convincing argument that "gender is enacted in organizational discourse and deeply embedded in managerial practices" (p. 282). Fundamental to their argument is the connection between masculinity and the organizational discourse related to rationality. They chart a long history of male-related bias from Descarte to Kant and Weber that frames what outwardly appears to be gender-neutral discourse and practice. They suggest that "...rationality is not a gender-neutral concept" (p. 282) and that

> ...power is not something that is simply added to rationality; rather it is embedded in (organizational) structures, enacted in (scientific) discourses and exercised in (managerial) practices. It is, in itself, power. (p. 282)

Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) used the discourse of strategy to show how the masculine concept of rationality is still deeply embedded in today's organizational reality. They found an emphasis in organizational discourse on order and adherence to systems of rules described in "seemingly neutral, scientific vocabulary, purged of value, but, in fact, it is value laden" (p. 292). The college involved in this action research study bears a striking resemblance to the discourse of 'strategy' described by Ross-Smith and Kornberger.

Structural power issues. In framing his discussion of structural factors that define the stage of action, Morgan (2006) asks an interesting question: "How is it that there can be so many sources of power, yet so many feelings of powerlessness?" (p. 190). Morgan suggests that because there are so many sources of power and that so many individuals and groups access many of these sources of power at different times, power relations are somewhat balanced in an organization. In this case, no one person or group feels in control. Morgan also suggests that a macro-political assessment may be leading to this feeling of powerlessness in that economics, class relationships, and other societal factors may limit the control that members of organization can exert on their own environment. "This phenomenon may explain why even the powerful often feel that they have little real choice as to how they should behave" (Morgan 2006, p. 191). An example of this in the college environment is related to the societal emphasis on accountability in public institutions. As such, quality assurance becomes paramount in any discussion of faculty evaluation and tenure processes. Learning and development are a lower priority in such an environment creating a conflict for many individuals in an organization whose personal priorities do not match the macro-political environment. This is a potential source of conflict for individuals such as department Chairs who occupy the middle ground between the teaching/learning focus of the faculty and the accountability focus of administration.

Conclusion

Micropolitical analysis is a useful tool that can be used by action research groups in assessing the planning context for their projects and in analyzing the action research project in its own right. The study of interests, conflict, and power in an organization brings to light the effect that diverse values and loosely associated groups have on the activities within the organization. It also can suggest ways to assess the interaction of an organization with the macro-political environment. Since this action research study involves the leadership roles of department Chairs related to peer supervision and shared leadership, the literature that discusses the role of the Chair informs the analysis of the conversations that the group undertook relative to their positions at the college.

Role of the Chair

The purpose of this study was partly to explore the relationship between the role of Chair and the process of faculty evaluation. This section considers some of the literature that describes this institutional role. Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, and Tucker (1999) describe the Chair role in the following way:

> Chairing a department is perhaps the most complex and ambiguous of leadership positions. The challenges higher education faces today will be met successfully only with the vigorous participation and intelligent support of its departments. And those departments depend in turn on their own internal synergy and the skill, imagination, and daring of their chairs. (p. 275)

This work by Hecht et al. (1999) provides an overview of the literature produced to that date regarding the role of Chair. From their comments above, it is clear that they view the Chair position as pivotal in the organization of higher education. Tucker's (1992) foundational work provides the backdrop for much of the literature in the field. He describes the role of the Chair as filled with paradox. It occupies the space between faculty and administration carrying with it the expectations of both groups. He states: "The chairperson...is both a manager and a faculty colleague, an advisor and an advisee, a soldier and a captain, a drudge and a boss" (p. 32). He describes the Chair as a leader without significant levels of authority. While more senior levels of management can make unpopular decisions with little effect on their day-to-day working relationships, Chairs must continue to live directly with those affected by such decisions. Tucker suggests that the maintenance of positive working relationships is often at odds with management expectations from senior administration. These paradoxical situations are often cited as sources of stress and discomfort by Chairs (Bowman, 2002; Chu, 2006; Gmelch, 2004; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Hecht et al., 1999; Lucas, 2000; Seagren, Cresswell & Wheeler, 1993; Tucker, 1992; Walvoord, Carey, Smith, Soled, Way, & Zorn, 2000; Wolverton, Ackerman & Holt, 2005). The literature can be analyzed in terms of Chairs and power, characteristics of college Chairs, the Chair role in evaluation, and the Chair role with new faculty.

Chairs and Power

According to Hecht et al. (1999), department Chairs in North American higher education institutions share several characteristics. They usually lack administrative experience, they lack preparation for their role change from faculty to Chair, they are not usually financially rewarded for their work as Chair, and they occupy their positions for an average of only six years. These characteristics mirror those of the college in this study. Since department Chairs are required to provide leadership without significant institutional authority, they must find ways of maintaining the support of department faculty by accessing other sources of power. Hecht et al. (1999) suggest that:

> ...much of that [leadership] power emerges from the ability of chairs to shape the culture in which they and their colleagues work, on their ability to focus the energy of their faculty; on the ways in which they determine how their colleagues both individually and collectively use their time;...and on their perseverance in seeing that actions agreed to are actually carried forward. (p. 6)

The tools that Chairs use in building their leadership power involve the management of interpersonal relationships including "building bridges, creating connections, and defusing tensions" (Hecht et al., 1999, p. 16). They go on to suggest that a major source of power for Chairs is their personal credibility making it very important for Chairs to build and maintain their credibility. Lucas (2000) lists twelve principles of effective chair leadership, eight of which are directly related to managing interpersonal relationships in the department: team leadership, developing shared goals, motivating team members, creating a climate of trust, utilizing participative decision making, managing conflict, and using the team to monitor its own functioning. She also suggests that Chairs must develop increased self-awareness in order to be effective leaders. Chu (2006) indicates that skilful Chairs regularly assess the micropolitical climate of their environment if they are to be effective in managing conflicting interests and motivations within their departments.

Management and Leadership Roles

The dichotomy of management and leadership roles is often used in describing the roles of Chairs. Bowman (2002) states:

> Academic chairs function as managers when they focus on structures, policies, processes, and paperwork. Academic chairs function as leaders when they focus on key aspects of organizational culture: mission, vision, engagement, and adaptability. (p. 159)

Gmelch and Miskin (1993) describe the roles of manager and leader among four role categories, suggesting that the manager role involving "...maintenance functions of preparing budgets, maintaining department records, assigning duties to faculty, supervising non-academic staff, and maintaining finances, facilities, and equipment" (p. 7) is the least liked by Chairs. The leader role which is the most favoured by Chairs includes activities that "...provide long-term direction and vision for the department, solicit ideas to improve the department, plan and evaluate curriculum development, plan and conduct departmental meetings" (p. 7). This leadership role also involves the relationships between the department and the external environment including the rest of the college and the outside world. The third role of faculty developer was seen by Chairs as their most important responsibility involving faculty recruitment, selection, and evaluation; and enhancing faculty morale and professional development (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). The fourth role of Chairs was that of scholar including maintaining currency in their discipline and in their teaching. Wolverton, Ackerman, and Holt (2005) found chairs to have three categories of concerns:

> …a chair's reality might be a day full of grappling with budgets (a management task), dealing with faculty (a leadership issue), and trying to stay current in their research and disciplines (a balancing task). (p. 231)

Again the contrast between management and leadership is raised in addition to the role of scholar. A similar dichotomy is suggested for school principals by Cooper et al. (2005) who suggest that the micropolitics of schools is often effected by the contradictory roles of Principals. As leaders, Principals are involved with professional development of teachers and as managers, they are responsible for operations and formal evaluations. They state:

> Both teachers and principals must carefully negotiate the political terrain established by this conflicting role because at any given time the principal can be a colleague (leader) or boss (administrator) or both. Teachers have to determine in an instant which role their principal is adopting at that moment. The principal, however, may move seamlessly between the roles, obfuscating the power relationships and undermining the trust and support that teachers need. (Cooper et al., 2005, p. 118)

The principal/teacher relationship and the Chair/faculty relationship are analogous in terms of these role contradictions and are often a source of ambiguity and stress. The long-lasting impact of the loss of trust and support is often suggested as a significant risk for department Chairs—particularly if they are interested in moving back to a faculty position.

College Chairs

The work of Tucker (1992) indicates that Chairs in community colleges differ from those in universities in the way they rank the importance of their roles. While university Chairs listed recognition and reward of faculty; evaluation of faculty for tenure, raises, and promotions; and encouragement of faculty to participate in professional development as very important, community college Chairs viewed these as least important. This could be the result of the managerial culture that is pervasive among community colleges in contrast to the traditions of peer review and faculty governance that often characterize universities. The personal preferences and circumstances of Chairs can also be used to characterize the way that Chair roles are enacted in colleges. Tucker (1992) suggests that the chosen roles of caretaker, broker, or developer are related to the motivations for assuming the position of Chair. The caretaker is often the approach taken in rotational Chair positions where it is assumed that the Chair will return to a normal faculty role following the Chair appointment. These Chairs attend to routine administrative tasks and leave faculty to decide their own needs and duties. The broker tends to link faculty with outside development activities and may be interested in other administrative roles in the future. The developer is a strong advocate of professional development in order to build the department strength and is interested in moving on in administration. The Gmelch and Miskin (1993) and the Tucker (1992) typologies of Chair roles involve role expectations in the first case and personal motivation in the second. Combinations of these motivations and expectations lead to significant ambiguity and variability in the way that Chairs accomplish their roles. Hecht et al. (1999), Lucas (2000), and Wolverton, Ackerman, and Holt (2005) point out the significant diversity of role definitions and responsibilities for department Chairs in North American institutions leading to a "landscape of contradiction."

Chairs and Faculty Evaluation

The role of department Chair in faculty evaluation is a particular area of concern, conflict and ambiguity reported in the literature. Tucker (1992) suggests that Chairs are and should be concerned about conflict within their departments in order to avoid destructive and hostile behaviour that can lead to the destruction of a department's effectiveness. One potential source of such conflict is seen as faculty evaluation where Chairs inevitably are faced with providing negative feedback for performance that is well below an acceptable standard. Tucker (1992) adds this stressor to a list of others experienced by Chairs including having to make decisions without good information, the relationship with the Dean, unreasonable workloads, and strong needs for affection and approval. Gmelch (2004) adds that making the transitions from faculty to Chair and back again are also stressful. The move to the Chair position involves a transition from the narrow, highly specialized, and independent focus of the faculty member into a role that demands generalists who are aware of the big picture and who are required to act in a social environment that involves much more public accountability (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Gmelch, 2004). The pressure on Chairs to demonstrate and maintain accountability has increased over the past two decades as governments and the public have demanded more accountability in public institutions (Gmelch, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Lucas, 2000; Wolverton, Ackerman & Holt, 2005; Chu, 2006). Faculty evaluation figures prominently in the accountability role.

Faculty performance review is often linked with the formative and developmental purposes in addition to those related to accountability. Tucker (1992) states that:

> Evaluation of faculty performance is one of the chairperson's most difficult and important responsibilities. Probably no other activity has more potential for strengthening or weakening the department over a period of years. (p. 126)

Tucker (1992) also suggests that many Chairs avoid their responsibilities related to evaluation:

> …because they view this activity as nonprofessional or even degrading. They regard faculty members as professional peers and feel that infringing on or criticizing a fellow faculty member's professional activities is unjustifiable. (p. 246)

The observations of Cooper et al. (2005) regarding the reaction of principals to their supervision roles in schools seem to apply to the community college Chair. They quote Gordon (1967) who said:

> …the historic role of supervision has been inspection and control, it is not surprising that most teachers do not equate supervision with collegiality. When teachers have been asked to make word associations with the term instructional supervision, most of the associations have been negative. (p. 113)

Cooper et al. (2005) suggest that the occasional visit to a classroom does not provide enough data upon which to make decisions about basic competence and that, "…teachers often see these classroom observations as mostly symbolic, done primarily to fulfill contractual obligations rather than to help teachers do a better job" (p. 115). This leads, they state, to a "worker-manager" relationship rather than a "professional-collegial" one. The stresses suggested by Cooper et al. are often evident in the involvement of chairs in faculty evaluation in colleges. Seagren, Creswell, and Wheeler (1993) indicate that, while faculty evaluation is an anxiety producing role for Chairs, there is significant potential for benefits including "…preventing low performers from decreasing departmental morale" (p. 46). Chu (2006) provides rationale for the importance of the Chair role in faculty evaluation when he states:

> Chairs are uniquely qualified to evaluate faculty since they are so much more familiar with the faculty, their work, their relationships with colleagues, and everyday interaction with students and staff. Like medical doctors and lawyers, the faculty are professionals who have been given the responsibility of knowing enough so that only they may judge their peers. That moral responsibility, plus the fiduciary responsibility and knowledge that a tenure decision is a multimillion dollar commitment, argues strongly for the importance of the department chair's evaluations of faculty and staff. (p. 70)

Such justifications for the involvement of Chairs in faculty evaluation are often tempered with a more developmental focus that includes formative assessment. For example, Tucker (1992) suggests that Chairs should routinely be involved in "performance counseling" of faculty that could include formal or informal discussions of successes and failures leading to plans for improvement. He cautions that Chairs involved in performance counseling should avoid distorting their feedback in their efforts to concentrate on strong points without addressing weak performance directly. Tucker (1992) suggests that such distortions might undermine the entire evaluation process. Similarly, Wolverton, Ackerman, and Holt (2005) report that Deans' expectations of Chairs include "the ability to be honest in evaluating faculty..." (p. 230). Performance counseling, as described by Tucker, seems closely aligned with the concept of mentorship that is discussed by the participants in this study. While there are clear and rising expectations for Chairs to be involved in faculty evaluation, Buller (2006) points out that, "many department chairs are not trained in the basic techniques of how to conduct performance appraisals and, as a result, feel uncomfortable whenever evaluation sessions occur" (p. 81). This signals an important factor in the orientation and training required when Chairs make the transition from faculty to Chair.

Chairs and New Faculty

The role that Chairs play in the introduction of new faculty into the institution has also been of significant interest. Tucker (1992) suggests that Chairs play a vital role in helping new faculty to understand "...the local folkways, the institutional pitfalls, and the way in which a faculty member may succeed professionally" (p. 36). Since Chairs, according to Tucker are initially seen as leaders by new faculty, they are in a unique position to play the role of mentor. In addition, Tucker acknowledges that because most college faculty members are not trained to be teachers, the Chair, "...must see to it that the new faculty members learn how to conduct themselves in a classroom" (p. 36). Buller (2006) goes further in suggesting that the Chair be responsible for establishing and leading a "faculty first-year experience program" for new faculty that resembles the student first-year experience program that is provided on many campuses across North America. Buller also addresses the dual role that Chairs play in assisting new faculty members to improve their quality of instruction, to form constructive relationships with their peers, and to nurture their quality of scholarship and creativity while at the same time carry out summative evaluation of their performance. She states that the Chair must clearly announce the kind of interaction that is taking place—summative or formative—and remain "…sensitive to the very real vulnerability that new faculty, untenured and unproven, may be feeling" (Buller, 2006, p. 264).

Conclusion

The role of department Chair in higher education is one of competing expectations and ambiguity. Because most Chairs remain as part of the faculty of the institution during their appointments, they often occupy an uneasy position between faculty and administration with expectations that often conflict. Chairs are often not invested with formal authority to make decisions but are expected to be leaders and decision-makers nonetheless. Power in the role of Chair seems to rest largely with the management of interpersonal relationships within departments and in the external environment. Chairs and those who have written about them have often characterized their responsibilities using two labels—management and leadership. This dichotomy seems to be split on the basis of routine, institutionally required processes on the one hand and interpersonal relationships on the other. There appears to be a greater expectation for leadership in faculty and department development and peer supervision in four year colleges and universities than there is in community colleges. The evaluation component of peer supervision is the most problematic for many Chairs even though there seems to be a consensus regarding the importance of this role for Chairs. A small body of literature suggests that the role of the Chair in orienting new faculty requires more attention pointing to an emerging leadership expectation for Chairs.

Conclusion

The theoretical concepts upon which this study is based involve four broad areas of interest. Peer supervision is relevant to increased leadership capacity in an organization by distributing leadership roles and skills to more individuals and groups and by sharing leadership through increasing responsibility for decision-making and knowledge creation. The literature reviewed shows the important role that faculty leaders can and should play in both summative and developmental assessment of their peers. Shared leadership has also been shown to be a critical component in the development of increased organizational leadership capacity, the management of knowledge work, and the survival of organizations in the current era of the knowledge economy. The increasingly competitive post-secondary environment coupled with increasing expectations for market-driven approaches in the management of such institutions places similar pressures on organizations of higher education. Micropolitical analysis has been shown to be an effective way to assess educational organizations because of the diverse values and inherent potential for conflict within them. A deeper understanding of the working environment can help in developing successful strategies for change through assessing issues related to interests, conflict, and power. Literature on the role of the department Chair also informs the study in that it relates the work of the participant researchers with the broader context of higher education institutions thereby helping to situate the potential applicability of the findings of this study. This literature demonstrates above all the ambiguities, role conflicts, and general lack of training or planned support experienced by Chairs in post-secondary institutions. This helps illuminate the overall positional dilemmas of the study participants, and to situate the potential applicability of the study findings.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this section I describe my understanding of how knowledge is constructed, how I conducted the research and how I defined the scope of this inquiry. As in any research study, it is important that I, as principal researcher, outline my position in terms of the epistemology and methodology that guided the research. Although the participants also took on the role of guiding and conducting the research including negotiating the agenda for the action research, the method remained consistent during the project.

Methodological Foundations

This study posed a number of personal dilemmas for me as I learned more about constructivist philosophy and tried to rationalize this with my previously positivist frame of reference. Since some of the fundamental principles associated with action research involve the exploration of the participants' realities and the development of group consensus, I had to shift my frame of reference in the analysis of this activity. Because I was also a participant in the conversations and the sharing of understanding, I had to clarify my relationship to this new way of knowing. The following discussion documents my search through literature that helped me to position myself relative to the research group, its actions, and my analysis of the process.

Constructivism

The constructivist concept of knowledge and truth seems so commonplace in educational research that it often is not discussed to any extent. From my perspective, however, as one who was schooled in the positivist frame of reference, the notion of the social or individual construction of reality and truth bears some exploration. Schwandt (2001) suggests that constructivism "...is a particularly elusive term with different meaning depending on the discourse in which it is used" (p. 30). He goes on to state that

> ...constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth. (p. 30)

Schwandt's subcategories of constructivism include a focus on the individual (radical or psychological constructivism) and on social processes (related to symbolic interactionism). This dichotomy, while interesting from an academic analytical point of view, does not fit well with my experience of the creation of knowledge. I support the view that the construction of reality relies on both the individual and social interactions with others and with the world. An individual forms a coherent image of reality through the interplay of internal processes of thought with the shared understandings and meanings of particular social contexts. Discontinuity between these realities leads to conflict that further validates the interaction between the two strands of constructivist thought. Schwandt (2001) also discusses the distinction between the strong and weak versions of social constructivism. Strong constructivism would be considered the more radical view in that all objects, thoughts, or aspects of the world are socially constructed. Weak constructivism:

> ...does not deny reality in the ordinary commonplace sense of that term. For example, one might write a social history of the notion of disability, schizophrenia, altruism, mental illness, family, domestic violence, gender, childhood, and so forth revealing how each is culturally produced or unmasking each as an ideology and still maintain that it is real. (Schwandt, 2001, p. 33)

This latter form of constructivism is more reasonable from my perspective, probably because it still recognizes the potential for the determination of a reality that is more enduring over time and space—one that can stand the test of intersubjective scrutiny and can act as a strong predictor of the consequences of actions that are taken based on that reality. Thus, my construction of the reality of the wetness of water that is shared with others will predict accurately that I will get wet if I am sprayed with water.

Conceptions of Reality

My belief in a weak social constructivist perspective leads me to recognize that I have an ontological position that supports the existence of a reality and a truth that is external to that of a socially or individually constructed reality. We are limited, however, in our realization of that externally determined reality by the historical, social, and physiological context in which we perceive that reality. Thus the work of Bhaskar (1999) holds particular interest for me. While I do not adopt Bhaskar's entire frame of reference, his work helped to identify a way to combine a positivist position with a constructivist position. His four aspects of truth are part of his philosophy of "critical realism":

1. Fiduciary. Our understanding of truth permits us to act with relative certainty of the consequences of our action.
2. Warrantedly assertable. There is a best way of acting.
3. Truth as absolute. Truth is expressed as a belief and becomes the basis for action.
4. Higher order proposition. The truth of truth. Truth grounded in universal generalization. Without this there is "no science, no discourse, no action, or no intentionality...." (p. 7)

Given this definition of truth, and given that our knowledge of reality and truth are limited by our ability to individually and socially construct it, the recognition of our limitations and the use of multiple sources of information and perspective are required to give us an ever deeper realization of that truth. Bhaskar (1989) in discussing the reality of social facts states: "It must be noticed, however, that we are here dealing with a most peculiar kind of entity; a structure irreducible to, but present only, in its effects" (p. 81). Bhaskar (1999) describes the stratified nature of truth and the construction of reality to realize truth. As we improve our abilities and deepen our understandings of our individually and socially constructed reality, our reality will withstand the tests of intersubjectivity, time, and location. Action research, through its cycles of participant interaction, reflection, and interpretation, is an ideal vehicle to penetrate the strata that constitute our realization of truth.

Having indicated my belief in a realism-based ontology, I also know that this is of little consequence in the quest for knowledge in the construction of reality. As Smith and Deemer (2000) point out, "all observation is theory-laden...[and]...there is no possibility of theory-free observation or knowledge" (p. 877). Thus, no matter what we believe the nature of truth to be, we can only ultimately know what our construction of reality is—either in our own minds or in the context of a socially shared reality. Smith and Deemer (2000) also point out that this realization has led to concern of researchers with their own vantage points and involvement in the research, with issues of reciprocity, and discussion of the politics and ethics of ethnographically based research. They characterize the attempt to justify the various forms of realism with relativism as "quasi-foundational." Such neorealist philosophies have resulted in attempts to create new definitions of validity that somehow take into account an external, knowable reality or truth. I find myself, therefore, in the same quandary described by Smith and Deemer

(2000) in their discussion of quasi-foundationalism. Any effort to determine criteria for the determination of truth or validity of research, they state:

> …must take place within the context of [a] commitment to ontological realism on the one side and, on the other, [a] realization that they are obligated to accept a constructivist epistemology. The former announces a commitment to the proposition that there is a real world out there independent of our interest in, or knowledge of, it. The latter announces a commitment to the proposition that we can never know if we have depicted this real world as it really is. (p. 880)

In the final analysis, we can only appreciate reality or truth on the basis of our own construction of it. To suggest that we can ever establish criteria for the evaluation of a truth that shows clear correspondence to an external reality is not tenable. Even though we suspect that such a truth exists, we must logically fail in the quest to remove the influence of our own being from the appreciation of the truth or even from the conditions that we observe since our mere action of observing has impact on that which is researched. As I turned to the task of thinking through action research methodologies, therefore, I did so from a nonfoundationalist view of the structure of reality and truth. As Lincoln (2001) put it: "[f]ar from being a choice, relativism and relativistic philosophies and standpoints characterize the world we have inherited, for better or worse. …It's a relativistic world, and there's nothing you can do about it; so, get on with it" (p. 33). I believe, then, in a constructivist theory of knowledge that is relativistic to the extent that certain truths will take on the quality of externally determined reality because they are widely held, persist over time and space, and are supported through various forms of triangulation. The stratification of knowledge pointed out by Bhaskar (1999) is useful in that it takes into account the human limitations of our ability to comprehend and to construct knowledge. As we gain sophistication and improved thought processes, we can gain deeper and deeper understanding of that constructed reality. By its nature, participatory action research provides an opportunity to critically deepen our understanding of reality by sharing the observations and understanding of the participants and by achieving a constructed reality that more closely approaches an externally validated form of truth. The participatory action research team can test its constructed reality in its actions, reflections, and observations in the iterative cycles of the research process.

Study of Practice

This action research project employed conversation as the principal mode for the construction of the knowledge and understanding of the participants in their roles of department Chair considering their current and desired practices related to peer supervision and leadership. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) describe five traditions of the study of practice:

1. Individual performances, events, and effects; studied objectively from an external perspective.
2. Wider social and material conditions and interaction; studied objectively from an external perspective.
3. Intentions, meaning, values; studied subjectively from the internal perspectives of practitioners.
4. Language, discourse, and traditions; studied subjectively from an internal social perspective (describe, interpret, evaluate).
5. Change and evolution of practice. Studied using all four traditions above and understood as reflexively restructured and transformed over time. (adapted from p. 574)

Working from this typology of action research traditions, my study is situated in the fifth approach: change and evolution of practice drawing from the shared values, experiences, and meanings of the practice of the research group participants. The dichotomies suggested by internal *versus* external (objective vs. subjective) and individualistic *versus* social forms of inquiry were problematic in light of my stance that reality is constructed though the interaction of both individual and social constructions of reality. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) state that these dichotomies are "mutually constitutive aspects of one another both of which are necessary to achieve a more comprehensive perspective on practice" (p. 575). Conversations in this study embraced discussion that moved freely from one tradition to the other demonstrating a comprehensive perspective on practice. The study of practice can also be described as political since it involves divergent interests and conflict. Probing these concepts through conversation provided participants with the opportunity for deep, authentic involvement in sharing their understanding and meaning that involved reflection on their own practices. This knowledge was applied to the problems that arose during the conversations resulting in a plan to change their practice and the practice of the institution. Such research methods:

> engage participants in a collaborative process of social transformation in which they learn from, and change the way they engage in, the process of transformation....[C]oparticipants attempt to remake and improve their own

> practice to overcome distortions, incoherence, contradictions, and injustices. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 579)

This stance also requires a notion of truth that suggests that truth is only provisional, that it is

> always fallible, that it is always shaped by particular views and material-social-historical circumstances, and that it can be approached only intersubjectively—through exploration of the extent to which it seems accurate, morally right and appropriate, and authentic in the light of our lived experience. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 580)

This understanding of truth and the traditions of study of practice helped to frame the nature of the inquiry. It provided me with a new understanding of how the reality developed by the participants must honour the knowledge, meanings, and understandings of the participants. This understanding is very different from the positivist perspective that had previously often framed my own practice of institutional research and management and opened new insights for me about the possibilities for truly collaborative development of knowledge.

Action Research

The search for knowledge through participatory action research traditionally employs three types of reasoning: instrumental or technical, practical, and critical or emancipatory. I include this discussion because it helped me to facilitate the conversations that formed the method of this study and because it is a system of reasoning that matches my own view of the construction of knowledge in this setting. In order to achieve the reconstruction of the past into a construction of the future through comprehension of the human actions that led up to the current situation—that is, emancipatory reasoning—both instrumental and practical reasoning must be employed. In instrumental reasoning, goals are specified and the ends are not questioned. Improvement of efficacy and improvement of efficiency are the aims of such reasoning. In this study, the goal of creating a new model of supervision, its efficacy and efficiency, was not questioned since the participants volunteered with this in mind, Practical reasoning questions both the ends and the means. The participants in the study were knowing participants—their actions were shaped by reasons and perspectives. They chose actions among conflicting values. This reasoning is required when:

1. the question must be answered
2. the grounds for making decisions are uncertain
3. the existing state of affairs is taken into account

4. each question is unique
5. a choice must be made amongst competing goals and values
6. the outcome is not predicable, and
7. a choice must be made on the desirability of end state not on the action
(Read, 1978, cited in Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 583)

This practical reasoning was prominent in the conversations in this project since the practices of the existing form of supervision, ideal forms of supervision, and the new emerging form of supervision were the subject of inquiry. Emancipatory reasoning was only briefly employed in the conversations related to the shifting culture of the organization and did not figure prominently in the actions taken by the group. The research group did critique their work environment as described by Kemmis (2001) in his discussion of emancipatory action research, but they did not move to interventions that would disrupt the cultural, social and historical processes within the institution.

Practical Action Research

My stance entering this research was from the practical action research tradition as described by Kemmis (2001) and advocated by Bradbury and Reason (2006). This practical tradition of action research:

> ...has technical aspirations for change, but it also aims to inform the (wise and prudent) practical decision-making of practitioners. Much of the action research influenced by the work of Donald Shön (1983, 1987) is of this kind. On this view of action research, practitioners aim not only to improve their practices in functional terms but also to see how their goals, and the categories in which they evaluate their work, are shaped by their ways of seeing and understanding themselves in context. (Kemmis, 2001, p. 95)

Kemmis also states that such studies often involve narrative reports of self-reflective practice aimed at helping others to improve their own practice. This study adds the component of participatory action research which emphasizes dialogue, collaboration, and group action as described by Grundy (1988) and Reason and Bradbury (2006) to the practical tradition described by Kemmis.

I was most interested in how we moved responsibility for supervision of academic staff to department Chairs in the college. Action research, with its participative, analytical, and action orientations, was ideally suited to support the notions of distributed leadership, constructivist concepts of knowledge creation, and organizational change. Conversation that was authentic and directed formed both the research method and the source of the data for the study. The exploration of the nature of the organization using a political frame of reference helped the participants to take a critical stance in the creation and exploration of their research questions.

Action research is, by definition, a methodology for research. The recursive cycles of "planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated" (Grundy, 1988, p. 353) led, in this study, to the creation of new knowledge. Grundy (1988) also points out that two other conditions are necessary for action research. The first is that the process must be a social practice and the second is that the project must involve "those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity" (p. 353). Reason and Bradbury (2006) define action research as "...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view..." (p. 1). They go on to state that:

> It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 1)

Greenwood and Levin (2007) view participation as an essential component of all action research. Reason and Bradbury also describe action research as "...a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge..." (p. 1) but contrast it to other more traditional forms of academic research in its processes, purposes, and the involvement of participants. Gustafsen (2001) suggests that action research provides opportunity to create change through "...the complex interplay between theory and practice" (p.17) with new emphasis on characteristics of social organization that promote initiation, development, and implementation of new ideas. Gustafsen also stresses the importance of viewing action research as "dialogue situations" that are "relational-responsive events where each event has a strong constructive side to it" (p. 24). Such "moments of dialogue" suggest that research is part of the action and not a supreme authority. Gustafsen feels that this makes detailed descriptions of the context and actions of the participants in action research less important since it is not possible to replicate the events and products of a truly participatory action research project. While I agree with Gustafsen's contention that participatory action research cannot be replicated, I believe that it is important to report process and context to the extent that others can speculate on the applicability of the approach and the knowledge to their own environments. This can act as a catalyst to their own participatory action research projects rather than a source of theory to inform their practices directly.

Participation in Organizations

For many years, action research advocates have proposed large scale, broad-based incorporation of action research in efforts to democratize organizations and society as a whole. They suggest that decisions and practices would become truly democratic involving all who are directly affected. I became interested in the notion of participatory action research as a vehicle for moving an organization toward more distributed forms of leadership where the knowledge of the organization was democratically shared and built through broad participation. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) state that power and knowledge are intimately connected and that knowledge, action, and consciousness are critical components of action research. All are given voice in truly participatory development of knowledge and action. They caution, however, that introducing and mandating such processes on a broad scale could lead to reinforcement of existing power relations. Participation without a corresponding change in power relations is only the "illusion of inclusion" in that what emerges from highly structured involvement exercises claim, incorrectly, to represent what is really desired by the people. This has the effect of silencing opposition to the will of the powerful. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) suggest that there is little known about large scale adoption of participatory approaches either on the ability to co-opt resistance or to create an environment to support change from below. They describe six enabling factors that they believe would help to maximize the change potential for participatory process: institutional buy-in at all levels, stressing the importance of personal attitude and behaviour changes, providing enough time for participatory activity, linking to social movements and local capacity, creating vertical alliances and networks, and monitoring for quality and accountability related to degrees of participation. The work of Gaventa and Cornwall is instructive in applying a truly participative methodology to this project.

The three objectives of action research described by Park (2001) of "...gathering and analyzing necessary information, strengthening community ties and sharpening the ability to think and act critically..." (p. 84) led him to suggest a theoretical structure for the knowledge that is involved in such inquiry. He states:

> Dialogue occupies a central position as inquiry in pursuing the three objectives of participatory research, and the knowledge associated with them, by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together. (p. 84)

This view supports the methodology selected for this study in that conversation was both the research method and the source of data. Park's typology of the knowledge involved in action research includes representational knowledge—based on correlational and causal relationships and on interpretation as in Gadamer and Heidegger; relational knowledge—based on social interaction as in Habermas; and reflective knowledge as in Freire. By relating these epistemological underpinnings or knowledge generation in action research, Park is hoping to bring methodological rigor to these activities. He also shows the intimate connections between the knowledge developed as a result of the practices and social interactions among the participants. Kemmis (2001) in discussing the contribution of Habermas to action research considered mutual understanding and unforced consensus about what to do as generally accepted precursors to action research. Kemmis suggests a third contribution:

> To these, a third feature has been added: *making communicative space.* A previously unnoticed aspect of communicative action was that it *brings people together around shared topical concerns, problems and issues* (author's emphasis) with a shared orientation toward mutual understanding and consensus. (p. 103)

This aspect is of critical concern to this study in that the creation of communicative space is one of my interests in exploring action research as a potential institutionalized approach to change in the organization. The rigor associated with action research, its knowledge generating capacity, and its potential for creating communicative space are all motivations for engaging in this study.

Conversation as Research

The processes of analysis, conceptualization, and planning in a collaborative and social setting often involve conversation as the medium for information transfer, intellectual engagement, and sensemaking in the social context of the collaboration. Conversation not only describes the process by which the social action of research occurs, it is also the source of the data that becomes part of the public dissemination of the research results. Feldman (1999) states, "...conversations among teachers serve as a research methodology in which the sharing of knowledge and the growth of understanding occurs through meaning making processes" (p. 126). Feldman (1999) describes three types of conversation that are included in this research methodology. In the first, oral inquiry, conversation follows specific theoretically grounded procedures requiring careful preparation, collection of data and documentation. These exchanges are "self-conscious, and can be self-critical attempts ...to improve and understand their practice" (p. 127). In oral inquiry, reflective conversation begins with a descriptive review of a particular situation in which a question is posed. Other participants engage in the conversation first to discuss the particulars of the descriptive review and then to reflect on the larger issues involved in the review. The second type of conversation that Feldman describes is collaborative conversation. Such conversations result in growth and sharing of understanding and relational knowledge that is clarified in action. Participants share their experiences, reflect on them, and tie them to the political and social structure of their situations. The third form of conversation is referred to as "long and serious conversations." Feldman suggests that this research process is "enhanced normal practice" in which anecdotes are shared and other participants listen, question, and subsequently tell other anecdotes. This story-telling is a form of oral narrative in which new ideas are tried out on others. When supported by collection and analysis of data the "long and serious conversations" become research. Since knowledge and understanding are generated and shared, Feldman contends that conversation is itself a methodology of research and not just a method within action research.

The Feldman (1999) concept of conversation is separate and distinct from interchange, discourse, or talk. He suggests that to be authentic, conversation must possess the following characteristics:

> 1. a conversation occurs between or among people,
> 2. it is a cooperative venture,
> 3. there is a direction to conversation,
> 4. new understanding arises through conversation, and
> 5. conversations are not governed by the clock. (p. 130)

Conversations must involve a genuine exchange of views in which one contribution leads to another and in which the contributions depend on each other. The participants must be cooperative. The direction of the conversation relies on this cooperation and evolves through hermeneutical processes as understanding grows in the participants. "Direction changes, goals change, and the participants come to new and different meanings through the conversation" (Feldman, 1999, p. 132). Feldman concludes that conversation satisfies Stenhouse's criteria for research in that it can be a systematic and critical inquiry that is made public (Feldman, 1999). In this study, conversation was the major research method that accompanied the recursive cycle of action research. The participants collaborated in all aspects of the design and conversation defined the reflexive nature of the actions that were undertaken. Conversation also provided the data necessary to demonstrate the effectiveness of the activity and to define the ongoing praxis of the participants.

Action Research and Validity

Bradbury and Reason (2006) provide a framework for assessing the validity of action research that also suggests how action researchers can make choices regarding the emphasis of their research. They suggest that their framework broadens the scope of the concept "...shifting the dialogue about validity from a concern with idealist questions in search of 'Truth' to concern for engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important" (p. 343). This action research study holds much in common with the following words of Bradbury and Reason (2006):

> A participative worldview draws our attention to the qualities of the participative-relational practices in our work. Issues of interdependence, politics, power and empowerment must be addressed at both micro- and macro-levels, that is, in inquiring relationships in face-to-face and small-group interaction, about how the research is situated in its wider political context. (p. 344)

Bradbury and Reason hold the view that there are three manifestations of action research that mirror the three levels of engagement of conscious, action-oriented people in an organization namely: first-person research practice which involves one's own work, second-person research practice which involves the work of partners, and third-person research practice which involves the work of people in a wider context. They suggest that this results in a logic of continuous change that can support radical transformation. With this in mind, they suggest five criteria that can be used either to inform the choices that action researchers make in carrying out their work or in assessing the validity of the work once it is accomplished. In this study, I have used this framework to assess the validity of the work and in assessing the long term viability of action research as a routinized form of change in a higher education institution. A routinized process in an institution would be one that is normally considered as an option when developing a strategy for addressing an issue, problem, or desired change. Credibility and usefulness would be criteria that would sustain the routine application of such a process. The following is a summary of the questions that Bradbury and Reason (2006) suggest should be asked in assessing the validity of an action research project:

Is the action research:

- Explicit in developing a praxis of relational-participation?
- Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?
- Inclusive of a plurality of knowing?

    - Ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity?
    - Embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
    - Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
- Worthy of the term significant?
- Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure? (p. 350)

They suggest that "...no action research project can address all issues equally and that choices must be made about what is important in the emergent and messy work of each action research project" (p. 349). Because the criteria of Bradbury and Reason are so congruent with my own views of action research, I found this framework to be especially applicable to this study.

Conclusion

I have discussed the literature that has informed the methodology of this study by reviewing the foundational principles of action research and its relationship to participatory action, democracy and change. The aims of this research study included the exploration of action research as a potential mechanism to create organizational conditions that would foster more democratic forms of dialogue. The topic of the study led the research group to consider a more democratic form of supervision—one that empowered faculty to become more authentic in the critique of their peers and one that empowered those being supervised to have more control over the processes that affected them. The concept of distributed leadership also supports the democratic ideals espoused by the writers reviewed in this chapter. The Chairs in this project discovered ways that they could enact leadership in a peer environment that supported democratic principles of involvement and participation. Because action research is seen as a social endeavour, the concept of knowledge development through social interaction, conversation, and relationships is particularly important to this study. New approaches to the determination of validity of action research have emerged that help to bring rigour and accountability to the practice of action research. As such, this has been incorporated into this study.

Procedure

The study involved five academic Chairs interested in developing their management skills of supervision, committed to the notion of shared leadership in the organization, and willing to commit time and effort into working with colleagues in a collaborative venture. The project began in May, 2004 and concluded in March, 2005.

There were 7 group meetings to discuss the planning context, research questions, and the development and implementation of the action plan. Individual interviews were held following the first and final group meetings. The following paragraphs provide details of these methods, the process for analysing data and ensuring trustworthiness, the ethical procedures, and the limitations and delimitations of the study methods. I begin by describing the institutional context, considerations related to my position as a researcher, and the people who participated in the study.

Institutional Context

I gained support from senior management for an unknown outcome before we began. My research project was listed in our college strategic plan as a source of potential alignment of goals that would achieve an increase in the leadership capacity of the organization. This act of trust seemed to rely on my reputation, the reputations of the participants, and the relationships of trust that pre-existed among some of the senior administrators. The college had hired a new Dean whose role was partly to promote leadership development. The new Dean and I established a clear understanding of my role as a researcher relative to hers as a facilitator of leadership development. Institutional support for this project was essential. Given the feelings of powerlessness on the part of faculty and their distrust of administrative motives, the research group members approached the context analysis portion of the project from a micropolitical perspective—discussing their experiences of power, influence, and coalitions. The nature of the current structure of supervision and empowerment became the focus of the conversations and plans were directly related to an overall goal of reconstructing college faculty tenure processes through the enhancement of the leadership role of Chairs. This placed the research group in the position of being distinctly critical in that it would have to plot a course of action that would challenge the constraints of the institution on political and cultural levels of operation. Many senior administrators knew about and supported this critical direction as a result of discussions regarding the necessity to build leadership capacity in the organization.

I was both a facilitator and participant in the research group. In embarking on this research project several considerations were addressed by the research group, the senior management of the college, and by me. I was in a position of power relative to the other participants in the group. During the study, I was the interim academic Vice President, but since the participants reported to Deans, they were not under my direct supervision. It was important to establish a trust relationship that permitted the participants to feel free to express themselves fully and authentically with no fear of reprisal or future harm. Senior management was prepared to give up some control of evaluation of faculty as evidenced in the concurrent review of the policy on faculty evaluation and in the stated desire of Deans to have Chairs take a more supervisory position relative to this evaluation. I felt that one of my contributions to the research group was to share with them the concerns of senior administrators. The actions we proposed took into account this particular institutional context.

Inviting the Participants

I sent the 28 academic Chairs in our institution a short description of my research proposal and invited interested individuals to contact me about volunteering to participate. Four Chairs initially responded to my invitation but withheld commitment until we had an initial meeting to discuss the project in more detail. A fifth participant volunteered after I asked her to consider participation following a meeting in which she had made some comments related to the reluctance of Chairs to be involved in peer evaluation. While she did recall the request for volunteers, she had not responded because of time constraints. I indicated that she could make a final decision regarding participation upon reading my proposal and attending our first meeting. I provided each of the five potential participants with a copy of my research proposal which described the general area of inquiry, potential research questions, the research methodology, my initial assessment of the research context, and my own research stance. I held an initial information meeting that described the action research methodology and the general area of inquiry. Since all members of the group were well known to each other, it was not necessary to conduct any initial "get acquainted" activity. I explained the ethical procedures governing the project, the precise nature of commitment I was requesting, and stressed that their involvement was fully voluntary and that they could decide at any time to terminate their involvement. All five agreed to participate. They all signed the consent form found in Appendix B.

All five participants were Chairs of academic departments at our college. I was the sixth participant. The five Chairs were all experienced in their positions and had been instructors in their respective academic disciplines for many years. They represented two of the four academic divisions in the college and thus had two of the four academic Deans as supervisors. Two of the participants chaired departments that provided university transfer and collaborative degree completion programs. Three of the Chairs were from departments that delivered one-year certificate and two-year diploma programs leading directly to employment. Table 1 lists the participants and their experiences at the College and in leadership roles.

Table 1. Composition of Research Group (pseudonyms are used)

Research Group Member	Years at the College	Years as a Chair	Number of Faculty in Department	Other leadership positions
Shannon	15	7	45	Professional Association and public boards
Meghan	17	7	9	Work on public boards and manager of businesses
Carol	25	12/2 (two different depts.)	4/10	President of three different non-profit organization boards, chair of provincial program coordinating committee.
Siobhan	22	6	6	Chair in two other departments
Mona	11	3	8	Leadership roles on College committees
Gerry	32	5/5 (two different depts.)	8/30	Dean, interim Vice President academic, many college committees, faculty association executive

One member of the group was on a sabbatical leave during the year of the project. She had been a Chair when she volunteered for the project and was engaged in full time studies in a doctoral program at a university. The research group was asked about her continued participation and it was determined that her experience at the college and her current perspective would be valuable to the group. I was the interim academic Vice President at the time of the research project and a co-chair of the faculty Professional Standards Committee which was working on a major faculty evaluation policy revision. I had been an academic Dean prior to the project and at the writing of this dissertation I am the associate Vice President of strategic planning and research at the same college. Four of the five Chairs have continued on as Chair following the conclusion of the study. One participant has since retired and has continued on in a part time faculty position as well as a contract position to assist Chairs in the new mentorship role that was established through this action research project. The member returning from sabbatical has gone back to full time teaching at our college.

Planning the Process

At our first gathering to introduce the study, the group generated ideas for the project process. I suggested that the participants keep a log for the purposes of tracking the research process, our discussions, and the participants' own reflections on the process. This was left voluntary for the participants but I kept my own research log for the purposes of this dissertation. In addition, the group decided that all its discussions would be held in confidence unless there was a discussion, and consensus reached, on the dissemination of any information that might be required in implementing a plan or in gathering data. It was decided that recording of our meetings would be acceptable and that transcripts of the meetings would be produced, but that these recordings would be held in confidence and disclosure would be approved by the group before publication of this dissertation. Upon this agreement, recording of the meetings began.

Further, the rules of conduct for our meetings were established collectively by the group. We discussed the theoretical constructs of the research process outlined previously in this chapter. We decided that mutual respect, civility, and efforts to achieve true understanding of each other's points of view would characterize our interactions. It was also decided that the group did not have to achieve agreement in all its discussions but that thorough understanding of each other's points of view was essential and expected. At this point in the discussions, there was only a vague reference to a six or eight month project timeline with group meetings that would be held when schedules could be meshed. Time was to be provided at each subsequent meeting for reviewing notes of the previous meeting and for planning our next meeting time. It became apparent that the schedules of all six participants were too variable to suggest a regular meeting time.

Research Group Meetings

After the initial meeting, six research group meetings occurred approximately once per month with a longer break between meetings 1 and 2 (summer break) and meetings 4 and 5 (December break) for a total of 7 group meetings. Meetings were held in late afternoon or early evening with a light supper provided when the meeting began later than 5:00 PM. Group meetings were scheduled for two hours with only a few meetings extending no more than 30 minutes past the designated ending time. Busy schedules prevented any more deviation from the scheduled times of the meetings. I chaired all the group meetings. After the first meeting, each meeting began with a review of the notes from the previous meeting. I prepared these notes as I listened to the tapes of the previous meeting and sent them electronically to the participants approximately three days in advance of the next meeting. The review of the notes usually took approximately 30 minutes. The group members spent that time commenting on what had been said, asking for clarification from each other about what was meant, and formulating the topics for the current meeting. In every case, the group found topics from the notes that they wished to pursue in more depth or topics that were natural extensions of the discussions at the previous meeting. After setting the rules of engagement for the group meetings, the group began conversations that explored the planning context for the action research process. We discussed the organizational context of the research, the personal positions of the participants as they entered the study, the goal of the research, the potential barriers to success, and the required learning that would precede the action plan. The action plan was developed during the first 5 group meetings.

Group meetings 5 and 6 concentrated on the strategy for implementing the plan and drafting the document that summarized the position of the research group. Following the implementation of planned action, the group members each reflected on their own understanding of the action and then shared their understanding with the group in meeting 7. Due to time considerations, and because of the nature of the plan, it was not possible to conduct a second cycle of the action research process. Our research group considered how a second cycle would have been applied, but the results of the plan could only be fully evaluated after a three year implementation process. Some members of the group did indicate interest in reconvening in order to become involved in evaluating the results of the implementation. The time frame was not reasonable for the purpose of this thesis.

Each group meeting was audio recorded and fully transcribed. In addition, I prepared two or three pages of summary notes from the audio tapes of each meeting which were sent electronically to group members a few days in advance of each subsequent meeting. The group spent time at the beginning of each meeting reviewing the notes clarifying their understanding of the ideas in the notes and verifying the accuracy of my interpretations. Group members also provided observations they had made in the intervening time period that supported their views from the previous meeting or suggested that further discussion was warranted because of new information. This reflective conversation set the agenda for the remaining part of the group meeting.

Interviews

I interviewed each participant researcher following the first action research group meeting. This was a semi-structured in-depth interview which I recorded by taking notes using a printed form. As the interview progressed, I checked the wording of my notes with the participant to assure accuracy of the notes. Many direct quotations were written and confirmed as the interview progressed. In the invitation to the scheduled interview, I asked participants to reflect on their own understanding of the research project and its potential for incorporation as a regularly used practice in the college. I conducted a second in-depth interview with each participant following the conclusion of the project using the same process as the first interview. I asked participants their views about peer supervision, the applicability of action research in our institution, and the changes that they had personally experienced as a result of their participation. I also probed their reflections about the efficacy of action research as a vehicle for introducing and managing change and its usefulness to formal leaders as an administrative practice. The questions I used to guide the first and second interviews are provided in Appendix C. Each interview took approximately 70 minutes.

Action Plan Implementation

Through the early group meetings, the group identified significant issues with Chair involvement in faculty evaluation and the conflicting values and motivations regarding leadership roles in this area of supervision. As a result, the group proposed an action that would alter the faculty evaluation policy to recognize the leadership role of the Chair and at the same time be sensitive to the conflicting position that Chairs often experience. The group provided a short written proposal to the faculty Professional Standards Committee which was in the process of a major revision of the existing faculty evaluation policy. Five members of our research group met with the faculty Professional Standards Committee to discuss our findings and our proposal. In addition, the members of the research group discussed the new approach to faculty evaluation with a number of groups throughout the college at the request of those groups in order to further clarify the proposal.

The proposal was written into the policy and a three year trial period is currently under way. The new approach for tenure was piloted by the Professional Standards Committee with 15 new probationary faculty prior to adoption of the new policy. An interim evaluation was carried out by an external consultant in order to determine the efficacy of approving the new policy and to determine if the pilot project was meeting its intended goals. The initial report, submitted in March, 2006 indicated that the pilot seemed to be meeting the desired outcomes and that it should proceed with minor logistical changes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began as I listened to the tapes after each group meeting and wrote the two or three pages of interpretive notes for distribution to the participants in advance of the following meeting. In listening to the tapes, I was particularly attentive to the three basic principles of conversation analysis outlined by Silverman (2006):

> 1. Always try to identify sequences of related talk.
> 2. Try to examine how speakers take on certain roles or identities through their talk (e.g. questioner-answerer or client-professional).
> 3. Look for particular outcomes in the talk (e.g. a request for clarification, a repair, laughter) and work backwards to trace the trajectory through which a particular outcome was produced. (p. 222)

This provided a way of noting the points that had resulted in conversation and signalled the importance to the group of the ideas that were raised. As I listened to the tapes, I also noted comments that seemed to have been missed by the group in conversation in order to give such ideas another chance for exploration. The research group discussed my notes and interpretations in the beginning of each meeting, seeking further clarification of each other and occasionally challenging the importance of some of the points that I had noted. These notes were not analyzed further and have not been cited in this study. Instead, the content became part of the transcript of the next meeting which was then used in further analysis. I encouraged the participants to review their logs before group meetings and in preparation for their final interviews in order to refresh their memories of the previous conversations. Again, this was voluntary. Three participants brought their logs to the interviews. My log was used to document the dates of the meetings and interviews, attendance at the meetings, notes regarding logistics for meetings and notes regarding conversations with my thesis supervisor.

I fully transcribed the meetings marking the second time that I had listened to the tapes. This helped me to become familiarized with the content of the transcripts. I reviewed the transcripts highlighting passages that directly related to the research questions and were signalled by Silverman's three suggestions for analysis. I also wrote code words in the margins and notes to myself that linked the passages to others in other parts of the transcripts. While some dimensions had emerged at this point, including leadership, peer supervision, coding of feedback by Chairs, reluctance to act as supervisors, power differentials within the organization, and the problematics of the current faculty evaluation system, I did not group the ideas and commentaries by theme. Instead, I began to write a narrative of the action research process noting the turns that the conversations took in chronological sequence. This narrative was supported by passages of conversation extracted from the transcripts. This exercise helped me to concentrate on the dimensions that shaped the action taken by the group and that contributed most to the final result. Through conversation with my thesis supervisor, I focused my analysis in three areas: micropolitics of the organization, the role of the department Chair, and action research as a routinized institutional practice. Additional review of the literature in these three areas provided the frameworks for the three areas of analysis and provided more insight into the interpretation of the transcripts. My interpretation of the conversations deepened with each redraft of the three chapters: Chapters Four, Five, and Six of this thesis. Many aspects of the data analysis spiral described by Cresswell (1999) characterized this process including managing the data; reading and writing notes; describing, classifying, and interpreting; and representing and visualizing. This ultimately produced the narrative and accompanying discussions.

The interview data was used to support the data interpretation of the group meetings. The hard-copy notes were highlighted and I wrote notes in the margins that began the process of coding. Since I had checked my interpretations with the interviewees at the interviews, I used these interpretations to support the data interpretation of the group meetings. This provided a reference point to judge the consistency of commentary provided by the participants in group meetings and in their interviews. I checked for major discrepancies and major reinforcement of ideas that had arisen in group conversation. This data was added to the interpretive narrative as I first wrote the chronological account and then the analytical account of the project. I returned to the transcripts and interview notes many times during the interpretation process to locate additional evidence and to check for contradictory evidence that might influence my interpretations.

Conversations with my thesis supervisor helped me to clarify dimension categories, and to deepen my analysis of the project. The following categories were identified as organizers of the data recorded through the transcription, note taking, highlighting, margin notes, writing, interpreting, and rewriting process. The topics of these categories were initially identified as important because of frequent occurrence and/or emphasis by participants. Later these were validated by participants, in group discussion, as representing what they considered collectively to be key components of their conversation in the action research process:

- Micropolitics
    - College culture
    - Power relations
    - Authentic peer evaluation
    - Strategies for planning
    - Strategies for implementation
- Role of the Chair
    - Peer review and supervision
    - Leadership and management
    - Leadership and supervision
    - Leadership and mentorship
    - Chair credibility
    - Chair workload
- Action research
    - Changes experienced by participants
    - Changes in the organization
    - Potential for application to other parts of the organization.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six present these findings organized around these categories of data and interpretation. Within these categories, specific themes are presented to capture the sub-topics raised in the group conversations.

Trustworthiness

That action research can be valid, credible and reliable has long been debated. In addition to validity considerations already discussed, I will summarize the care taken in this study to assure the trustworthiness of the research. Greenwood and Levin (2000) have put it quite succinctly:

> Credibility, validity, and reliability in action research are measured by the willingness of local stakeholders to act on the results of the action research, thereby risking their welfare on the "validity" of their ideas and the degree to which the outcomes meet their expectations . . . The core validity claim centers on the workability of the actual social change activity engaged in, and the test is whether or not the actual solution to a problem arrived at solves the problem. (p. 96)

The establishment of trustworthiness was critical to the success of this study and to its ultimate applicability in the practice of administration. Due to the conservative nature of managerial forms of administration, a high level of reliability and validity are often demanded before any changes would be adopted in the culture of administration at a community college. The qualitative nature of this study precludes the application of such notions of validity and reliability but the central question must still be addressed:

> How do we know when we have specific social inquiries that are faithful enough to some human construction that we may feel safe in acting on them, or, more important, that members of the community in which the research is conducted may act on them? To that question there is no final answer. (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 180)

The determination of trustworthiness for this study applied the criteria established by Guba (1981) of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and the concept of catalytic validity as discussed by Lather (1986). Validity based on the Bradbury and Reason (2006) criteria already discussed was considered in the analysis of the action research in this study in Chapter Six.

Credibility

Credibility, or truth value, is determined by "testing the credibility of …findings and interpretations with the various sources (audiences of groups) from which data were drawn" (Guba, 1981, p. 80). In this study, member checks were carried out at each stage of the action research cycle with the participant researchers. These member checks served the dual purpose of catalyzing the reflexive nature of the action research cycle while establishing the credibility of the data. The member checks involved interpretations of the data and summaries. The interpretations of the interviews and summaries of data were also checked with the participants.

Transferability

While findings of studies such as this cannot be generalized to all other contexts, it is quite probable that the findings might be applicable to other contexts where essential similarities exist. Guba (1981) suggests that this requires thick description of the context in which the study takes place so that readers will have sufficient information to judge the transferability of the findings to their own contexts. Greenwood and Levin (2000) confirm this view. In my study, the context of the college, its culture, and its structure are provided in addition to clear descriptions of the individuals who participated in the study. Careful consideration was given to making the descriptions as rich as possible to assist the reader in this comparison.

Dependability

Dependability is analogous to consistency and reliability according to Guba (1981). He states:

> ...the concept of consistency implies not invariance (except by chance) but trackable variance—variance that can be ascribed to sources: so much for error, so much for reality shifts, so much for increased instrumental proficiency (better insights), and so on. (p. 81)

As the research team gained experience with the action research process and the reflexive nature of their actions, the meaning of their discourse shifted. This resulted in shifts in the interpretations of their observations. These shifts are documented in this study and used to demonstrate the emerging understanding that developed in the research group.

Confirmability

The issue of neutrality or objectivity can only be dealt with through the confirmation of the data as being available for scrutiny and interpretation by others with their own sets of values and their own realities. If the data are understood and the interpretations can be audited by others, confirmability will be established. In this study, the participants verified the data summaries of each group meeting and reviewed the three findings chapters to verify that the themes and analysis flowed reasonably from the data.

Catalytic Validity

Because action research is deeply imbedded in the concept of praxis-oriented research as suggested by Lather (1986), catalytic validity was employed as a measure of trustworthiness. "Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it, a process Freire terms conscientization" (Lather, 1986, p. 272). She goes on to state that self-understanding and self-determination are supported through the conscious channeling of the reality-altering impact of the research process. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) indicate that catalytic validity is particularly important where the impact on the participants is significant in the nature of the action that is taken. During the process of member checks that occurred within the action research process, data were collected to determine catalytic validity. This is further discussed in Chapter Six using the validity criteria established by Bradbury and Reason (2006).

Validity and Ethics

It is important to point out the connection between validity and ethics as described by Lincoln (2001):

> How we come to know is intimately tied to, and inextricable from, the relationships and relational qualities within the community of knowers, including our research participants. Epistemology is tied to validity because the act of knowing can be judged not only for the knowledge which it discovers or creates, but also by a measure of the caring, respect, dignity and social justice of the relationships within which the knowing came to be…Validity is thus a form of research ethics. *Where once validity 'measured' forms of fidelity in method, now it is a measure of fidelity between knowledge cocreators.* (emphasis is Lincoln's) (p. 59)

The issue that neutrality of the researcher is neither possible nor ethical suggests that any form of research that imposes clear borders between the researcher and researched is an imperialistic act that does not address the marginalized, colonized, or otherwise bordered subjects of research. Judgments of validity based on six standards—community, shared governance, neighbourliness, representation of multiple voices, enhancement of moral discernment, and the promotion of social transformation toward the just (Lincoln, 2001) are suggested in order to fully address the ethics of caring, respect, and obligation that will be described in the next section.

Ethics

Most systems of ethics involving research on human subjects are concerned with the impact that the research will have on the subjects. Carson (1996) suggests that in participatory or collaborative research, the researcher-subject relationship does not and should not exist and that the traditional forms of ethics are not sufficient to govern the relationships among the participants. Lincoln (2001) describes the inadequacy of standard federal and professional association ethics statements in addressing "…the ongoing conversation needed when participants become co-researchers and co-analysts in research processes, as in the case of action research, participatory research, or other forms of community-oriented and partially community-directed inquiry" (p. 33).

It is Carson's discussion of the position of "self" and "other" that had an important influence on me as a potential facilitator of action research. His discussion of the Confucian emphasis on the essential character of human nature—humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faithfulness—helped me to refocus my thinking about my relationships to the "others" in this research project. The notion of "mutual obligations and responsibilities that form the essence of collaboration" (p. 14) were explored by the research group. Through this conversation, a deeper understanding of the ethics of our research was reached. Carson believes that "obligation" should be considered as the motivation to guide "ethical behaviour" among the participants. He suggests that obligation is not planned but rather arises spontaneously as authentic engagement occurs between the participants and "others" that are impacted by the research. The circumstances of the relationships in collaborative situations became part of the ethical considerations for the project. Since the project involved the supervision of "other" faculty members outside the research group, traditional ethical considerations applied—particularly related to the minimization of the potential for harm. Consistent with the Confucian belief about the nature of humanity, ethical conduct was a natural product of the conversations and actions of the research.

The voluntary nature of the participation of the department Chairs in the research project was clearly established at the outset both in the invitation to participate and in the preliminary meetings. It was important to minimize the coercion that might be perceived by my position of authority. By recruiting participants on the basis of their interest in the project, I was able to reduce the potential for perceived coercion. It was difficult, however, to reduce the pressure to remain involved in the study. Normal group processes provided their own peer pressure to continue on as part of the group. The agreement to participate clearly documented the participants' rights to opt out at any time with no fear of negative consequences. This assurance was provided in both written form and during the preliminary discussions. Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study as it proceeded.

Issues of confidentiality figured prominently, particularly when issues were raised regarding the context of the study and barriers to potential success. Confidentiality was required of all group members. Permission to be recorded to have transcripts made from the recordings was obtained. The tapes that were made of conversations in the meetings will be destroyed upon publication of this dissertation. The transcripts will be destroyed five years after that date.

The most significant risk to the participants rests in the public disclosure of the research—either in the publication of this thesis or in the publication of articles by any of the participants. This is particularly true if I take seriously the advice given by Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) who state that "rigor is defined as the attempt to make 'data and explanatory schemes as public and replicable as possible'" (p. 28). They suggest that the level of public disclosure of richly defined context and thick description provides for transferability of the interpretations of qualitative research. Usefulness and consequently validity are enhanced by significant public representations of the data, the voices, and the interpretative/analytical processes employed. While participants' jobs may not be at stake, their effectiveness in the organization could be significantly altered. Their peers and supervisors could view them differently and not always more positively following the publication of the research. The ethical dilemma that I have addressed arises not necessarily from the actions of the research group and its participants, the sharing of information and meaning within the group, or from the ongoing analyses throughout the project. It stems instead, from the writing for dissemination. As Richardson (2000) points out, this "...writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 923). In the case of writing as the representation of my research with co-researchers participatory action research, situated and pragmatic ethical decisions were made during and following the research project. From the sense of obligation and responsibility amongst the participants, publication decisions were arrived at by consensus. Given this discussion, a system of situated ethics where the co-researchers were constantly involved in the determination of the ethics of caring, obligation, and protection of participants throughout the project up to and including the publication of the research was essential. To this end, I have used pseudonyms for all the participants except myself in order to provide a level of protection from potential harm in the organization in which they work. The participants met to discuss the disclosure in this thesis and agreed to its publication.

Writers in the field of action research have often described the difficulty in translating the discourse of the construction of knowledge to written forms. It is necessary to find ways of transmitting not only the facts of the research inquiry but also the new understanding and meanings achieved by the participants. This gives rise to the concern expressed by many authors that the constraints of language—particularly written language—often fail to convey the feelings of the participants and thus the true meaning of the understandings that they have constructed. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) refer to this as the "ghostly status of the general, the abstract, or the ideal—or, perhaps one should say, the unreal" (p. 596). In the transcription of conversations, meaning is often lost. This has been explored by Jardine (1997), Luce-Kapler (1997), Montgomery-Whicher (1997), and Oberg et al. (1997) in their experiments with finding better ways of transmitting the meaning of their research results. In order for the actions of a research group to be truly transformative, the participants addressed the problem of sharing their knowledge with others in the institution. This conversation became part of the action research project since it concerned itself with the promotion of change in the larger organization. With similar concern, Lincoln and Guba (2000) have suggested that it is crucial that "all stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text. Omission of stakeholder or participant voices reflects…a form of bias" (p. 180). They go on to state:

> …this fairness was defined by deliberate attempts to prevent marginalization, to act affirmatively with respect to inclusion, and to act with energy to ensure that all voices in the inquiry effort had a chance to be represented in any texts and to have their stories treated fairly and with balance. (p. 180)

Such discussions formed part of the situated ethics that were utilized in this study.

Limitations

Since action research mobilizes and interprets a process, it is inappropriate to consider aspects that emerge in that process as its 'limitations'. Nevertheless, the process itself was necessarily limited in terms of participants' time, energy, nature of the relationships that developed, and willingness or ability to participate fully in that process. In the discussion on conversation earlier in this paper, one of the important characteristics of authentic and directed conversation was that it not be influenced by time constraints. Given the busy schedules of the participants, time availability provided some limitation on the completion of these conversations. Interpersonal relationships did not pose any discernable limitations within the research group although this had been considered a risk before the project began. Relational dynamics amongst the participants and differential uses of language did have an impact on the quality of the discourse and thus had an impact on the construction of the reality of the participants. Some of these factors are documented later in this thesis.

My triple role of administrator, participant/researcher, and graduate student posed challenges in interpreting the data. Having been an employee of the college for 32 years, I may not have been able to recognize all the important aspects of the context of the study and thus I may have failed to report them. My doctoral studies and my interactions with my thesis supervisor and thesis supervisory committee have assisted in mitigating this limitation to some extent. The participants were asked for their views of my influence on the group as a result of these roles. These are discussed in Chapter Six. I had been away on a sabbatical leave for the year prior to the study and I may have developed increased sensitivity to the social and cultural dynamics of the college.

Since the study involved participants who knew one another and had experienced me as a senior leader, the situations in which these findings might prove applicable may be somewhat restricted. As described later, there was no requirement for some of the preliminary activities normally involved in the establishment of work groups. Trust within the group seemed almost taken for granted except for a brief discussion of group process. In addition, my position as interim academic Vice President provided institutional credibility for the study that freed this group from serious consideration of senior management issues.

Delimitations

I chose to limit the study to six participants in order to contain the size and scope of the data analysis. I used a general call for volunteers in order to establish commitment early on in the project assuming that initial interest in the topics and issues would only attract interested individuals. This was an effort to limit the work involved and minimize the existence of barriers to participation. I chose to work with Chairs since, for the most part, they are seen by their peers as leaders, although this assumption was tested during the course of the project. My ten years of experience as a Chair, while dated, helped me to become a knowledgeable participant in the conversations. The participants, except for me, were all female which likely had some impact on the nature of the conversations and the focus of the explorations of concepts. Better gender balance might have provided more insight into the gender-related power issues that I discovered during the analysis phase of the study.

I began my study in May 2004. This provided time to recruit the participants and seek the necessary approvals prior to the start of the project. The action plan was carried out in May of 2005. This corresponded to the cycle of evaluation and performance review that normally occurs at the college. Since the new tenure process that was introduced by our research group could only be fully assessed following a complete tenure cycle of three years followed by at least six months of analysis, the research group was unable to carry out the 'observe, reflect, and replan' phases of the next cycle of action research in reasonable time for the publication of this thesis. This time limitation restricted the study to the first cycle of action research. A true test of the validity of the research would entail careful data collection and analysis of the participants in the new tenure process and a reconvening of the research group to reflect on the results and propose changes to improve the process further.

Conclusion

Since I became aware of the process and application of action research in the field of teaching, I have been fascinated by the potential for this form of research to construct knowledge that is both grounded and relevant to the context in which it is situated. Its potential for the development of lasting change in groups of people is both intriguing and exciting. The criticism often levelled against the 'learning organization' paradigm is that the learning is often dictated by those in control and only for the benefit of the organization. If we accept the premise that educational institutions should be learning organizations and that this learning culture should be pervasive in all the work of the institution, administrators should find ways to become part of the learning process. This study provided insight into overcoming the potential barriers that could prevent administrators from being true participants in the learning culture through the incorporation of action research in their management practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

MICROPOLITICS: CONTEXT AND STRATEGY

The iterative process of this action research study began with the exploration of the planning context as part of the planning segment of the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting cycle described by Grundy (1988). Our participative action research group agreed that initial discussions of the political and historical context of the college culture would be beneficial in preparing to address the topics of leadership, supervision, and the role of Chairs. The plan for change emerged from the planning context analysis and from the experience brought to the discussion by the individuals in the group. This placed the research group in the position of taking political action that would inevitably challenge the status quo of institutional political and cultural constraints. Ultimately, the action plan would take advantage of organizational characteristics as understood by the participants that would mitigate the influences of inertia, mistrust, and fear of change. This chapter discusses the conversations of our research group using a micropolitical framework largely based on Gareth Morgan's outline for organizational analysis. Morgan (2006) states that:

> We can analyze organizational politics in a systematic way by focusing on relations between interest, conflict, and power. Organizational politics arise when people think differently and want to act differently. This diversity creates a tension that must be resolved through political means....By focusing on how divergent interests give rise to conflicts, visible and invisible, that are resolved or perpetuated by various kinds of power play, we can make the analysis of organizational politics as rigorous as the analysis of any other aspect of organizational life. (p. 156)

This chapter concentrates on the research group's exploration of organizational culture and micropolitics, the various sources of power in the college, how the research group employed their knowledge of our college micropolitics to strategize change, the outcomes of the analysis, and the group's construction of their reality. Given that this study is about the process of action research as an approach to promoting individual and group learning as well as organizational change and development, I focus throughout the chapter on process as well as content of the discussions. That is, I spend time showing not only the resulting themes of the group discussion that can inform thinking about supervision in terms of the organization's micropolitics, but I also endeavor to illustrate the micropolitics at play in our group discussions. In the concluding discussion, I relate the group's research more specifically to the literature of micropolitics. Throughout the following chapters, quotations from the transcripts of

Group Meetings indicate the Group Meeting number followed by the line numbers in the printed transcript. Interviews are noted with the interviewee, the interview number, and the page of the notes from which the quotation is taken.

Planning Context—A Micropolitical Analysis

The action research group's initial conversations concentrated on exploring the planning context related to their department Chair roles, their relationship to those roles, and their involvement in supervision and leadership in the organization. The group's micropolitical analysis did not use a formal micropolitical analysis structure but often focused on the words of micropolitics including power, conflict, influence, and control. Together we explored 'culture' which elicited some insight into their views of the planning context. This discussion also set the stage for the interpretation of their conversations regarding various aspects of power relationships in the institution and how they viewed their personal position relative to those power relationships.

College Culture

While the conversation in our first group meeting did use the term "culture" as a reference point, the group did not focus on defining the term. Each group member did have a chance to provide their own definitions of organizational culture in our first individual interviews which followed the first group meeting. Common themes that were part of their understanding of culture were: common values, emotional responses to the college environment, behavioural norms and various aspects of organizational discourse.

Definitions. There was general agreement that the college could not be defined as a single cultural entity but was a collection of diverse organizational cultures. Some examples of statements made by the participants relating their understanding of 'organizational culture' are:

> Meghan: It's about interactions and relationships between all stakeholders. It's qualitative and hard to define—a feeling. It's written and unwritten principles—ways of working together—the unwritten are more important. (Interview 1, p. 2)
>
> Shannon: Culture is that thing that really drives decisions, things that are considered okay. It's norms, values, expectations—not always explicit. (Interview 1, p. 2)
>
> Carol: It means climate. It's about community and it's diverse. There is a college community relative to outside the college—holding it together. (Interview 1, p. 2)

> Siobhan:...It's who we are, our past—a feeling. (Interview 1, p. 2)

These four comments indicate that the participants held a view of organizational culture that is consistent with most common definitions (for example: Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Hanson, 1996; Morgan, 2006). Thus, analysis of common values, norms and behaviours are all used to interpret organizational culture. The importance of unwritten or implicit values and expectations was pointed out by both Meghan and Shannon. Carol referred to the culture as "holding it together" mirroring the view of Terrence Deal as expressed by Hanson (1996) as the "glue that binds people together." The participants' use of the term culture throughout our study was consistent with the statements in their interviews.

When asked in their first individual interviews to describe the characteristics of college culture that they thought would constrain or support our project, the participants described a number of different aspects of culture. Carol described her observation that the cultures observed in career program departments and in university studies departments were "vastly different" with "strong emotions in the camps." She did not elaborate on the characteristics of each camp. She described one common cultural characteristic in the college as follows:

> Carol: Many people appreciate diversity and that's a positive thing. Many people are committed to looking at new ways of doing things. (Interview 1, p 2)

In this comment is embedded Carol's general optimism suggesting that change would be received positively. Meghan made comments similar to Carol's in her interview but added:

> Meghan: Our culture is related to money issues. Financial constraints often impede creativity. Things are changing like the new organizational structure, and a new [Vice President]. (Interview 1, p. 2)

Meghan's reference to money issues, financial constraint, and organizational structure suggest that she viewed the college culture as managerial with embedded values of efficiency and bureaucratic processes. Siobhan provided support for that view with her comments:

> Siobhan: We also have a bureaucracy with mandatory forms and stuff. It can be a petty annoyance or a major roadblock. It depersonalizes us. (Interview 1, p. 2)

Siobhan, however, seems to indicate that she does not support this particular bureaucratic aspect of our college culture. The depersonalization that she describes would indicate a level of alienation from what she perceives as a dominant culture. Other cultural characteristics were described including a growing interest and support for change, a general curiosity that supported a quest for understanding of new things, and an eagerness to grow and develop. Siobhan's comments are similar to those of other group members:

> Siobhan: Our people want to work in a place we are proud of. They want to understand. They have a desire to do their best. They will support something that is beneficial. (Interview 1, p. 2)

Siobhan's views indicate an underlying clash of values that, as some of our later conversations pointed out could lead to conflict and power struggles. While she saw the prevailing culture as depersonalized and bureaucratic she also viewed some parts of the college as supportive of growth, development, and inquiry. The tension between these two views of organizational culture continued to have an influence on the discussions regarding the potentially conflicting roles for Chairs that the participants expressed later in their study.

History. The role of history in college culture was described in the context of how important history is to the college and how it may be related to other characteristics of the college environment. The following conversation points out the positions of some group members:

> Meghan: ...And so there's all that historical stuff that I don't get. So I keep having to say, why do you do it this way?" And then, people say to me, it's historical. And I'm really tired of that historical bit. And I've made up my mind in the last two weeks that if you can't tell me why it was done this way, I've got a better way that it might be done..
>
> Siobhan: They can say why it was historically done.
>
> Meghan: No, they can't always say that.
>
> Mona: And I think there's a fit too between this notion of disengagement because if you depend on your history then you don't have to be as engaged. 'Cause everything runs by itself. So you don't have to—you can just coast so it sort of fits with that thing I have noticed. And in some senses, the history might even have been set up to foster the disengagement.
>
> Gerry: So if you preserve what was historically the case, then you can continue to be disengaged. I don't have to pay attention. I know exactly the way it's going to work.
>
> Carol: We've always done it that way.

> Mona: And in some senses, the history might even have been set up to foster the disengagement. You know what I mean? So the history actually allows people to...
>
> Gerry: So they'll defend the historical, won't they?
>
> Siobhan: But it can also if you know why you did it be a totally legitimate and thoughtful...the reason might be good.
>
> Others: Yeah.
>
> Meghan: The status quo is fine if you know why you did things. But why, if nobody can tell you why something is the way it is, and they go back and say well that's the way Bob did it, Bob's a long time gone from here. Right? [yeah]. It's kind of strange to me. (Group Meeting 2: 205-247)

This exchange implied that Meghan and Mona were impatient with the use of history as a justification for disengagement or inaction. Carol tended to agree with that point of view. Siobhan, on the other hand, was a defender of history. She seemed to believe that those who had gone before must have had good reasons for doing what they did. Implicit in this view is the notion that status quo should be maintained unless there is a clear understanding of why a change should be made. These two viewpoints illustrate one of the strengths of the research group in that there existed a constant tension between support for change because it is challenging and exciting and the need for change based on more thorough investigation of current conditions and identification of problems requiring change. While the value of history was not shared by all group members, there was general agreement that history was an important factor in understanding the college culture and the value placed on it by many staff.

Group members defined culture to include commonly held values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours. They agreed that they could not define a pervasive and singular culture at the college but rather they saw a collection of diverse cultures. The implied tensions within the organization that set the stage for political behaviour were raised by group members and became apparent to the group through subsequent conversations regarding power relationships in the college. History was seen as an important determinant of culture but not all members valued it in the same way. Some viewed history as a potential block to change.

Sources of Power

The meanings that the participants attached to the term culture provide a context in which to assess their conversations related to organizational micropolitics. In my initial communications to the group, I had outlined my view that our organizational context was related to our history and to the personalities of the Presidents that led the college. I described how the change of Presidents and accompanying administrative structural changes seemed to affect the organization, negatively influencing the efficacy of shared leadership and the empowerment of non-administrative staff—including faculty. This introduced the topics related to power, influence, and conflicting values and set the stage for micropolitical analysis. Conversation then focused on the relative influences of college Presidents, faculty, the faculty association, and credentialism. Group members also explored their own relationships to these power structures.

Power of the President. The discussion of organizational culture gave rise to a conversation about the power to set or change culture and the conflicts that arise as cultures clash. The participants challenged my planning context analysis by providing their own observations regarding the power structure of the institution. We first discussed the power of the President in setting the culture and agenda for the college:

> Meghan: ...somewhat [the culture] is always defined by the President to a certain extent...the President's agenda...Like I came in under [President L] and that was quite a different time, I think, as I look at what people say about it. And so I think that defines a lot of [the culture]...(Group Meeting 1: 193-200).

Meghan's comment provided partial support for my view that the President had a major influence in setting culture having observed a change herself and having heard others describe their interpretations of the change. Siobhan suggested that other factors were just as important. She stated:

> Siobhan:...'cause I think there's been a major change in the culture in the past year here. And that's the same President but a different acceptance of—or just a very different culture—I think there's a lot less trust and acceptance...out there. And I don't think it's verbalized in lots of parts of the college. And it was evident in the survey we [faculty] conducted that there has been a negative change..." (Group Meeting 1: 202-210).

Further probing of this idea indicated that recently the President had provided very inconsistent messages to the college that led to his being less trusted than before. Siobhan's comments regarding the erosion of trust indicate that she felt the President was still responsible for this shift. Shannon placed some context on this characteristic Presidential influence:

> Shannon: I don't know whether I would agree that the culture of the organization has changed very much...I think there are changes in some groups because I would say that the group I am part of—I don't think there has been that kind of change. But I think that you're right—there is certainly more talk in some places that you go. There is more negative talk than there was 2 years ago for sure. But I don't think it's organization-wide. That would be my experience anyway. (Group Meeting 1: 231-236)

Shannon's and Siobhan's comments mark a shift in the focus from one of general cultural characteristics to one of differential power and resulting conflict. Siobhan's characterization of loss of trust and Shannon's discussion of increasing unrest indicate their perception that power relationships were changing and that Presidential power was being challenged.

Power of Faculty. Power relationships in the institution became a new focus for the group at this point, and the discussion centered for a time on the power of faculty, the enactment of some of that power through their formal organization (faculty association), and the relationship of group members to that power structure. This conversation was important to the context analysis in that it helped the participants to situate themselves in the organization and helped them to more fully understand the roles that they felt they could fulfill more effectively. This began when Mona commented:

> Mona:...I see it as an organization that's actually controlled by faculty in that, when change occurs [the faculty] exerts a powerful influence to block the change. So it's actually kind of how faculty controls the college which is—[faculty] stay really quiet and have your positive [feeling] when all our needs are being met. And then, as soon as we feel that our agendas are not being met, we exert an enormous amount of control to grind it down. And I'm not sure if it has to do with [the college President] because the flip is too quick—it's almost like the college can flip, like you say, in a year. But next year if all the changes were stopped it would flip right back. So it's not so much for me a culture as it is the cultures in the faculty itself. (Group Meeting 1: 263-273)

Mona's view suggested that faculty had the power to stop activities that they didn't like or that they felt would interfere with having their needs met. Her comments also reveal her view that faculty more generally block change, that they use their power to promote their own agendas, and that their power can actually control the college in a negative way. She also suggested that the faculty could not be characterized as a single culture. This comment supported the views expressed by others in discussing the diversity of values and cultures in the organization. In response to Mona's comments, Siobhan suggested that the faculty often took time to accept new ideas, indicating a more considered response. Siobhan defended the use of faculty power to block change implying that it was a way of slowing change in order to allow for more considered response to institutional initiatives. Mona continued, however:

> Mona:... the influence is conservative but it also is sort of a comprehensive feeling of where the power lies....do you know what I mean? Like a comprehensive belief of where the power resides is actually with the faculty.....that they can control the outcomes....right? And the speed with which and the aggressiveness with which you need to do that. (Group Meeting 1: 287-291)

Mona was indicating her view that faculty were aware of their power and were aggressive in their blocking of change for the purpose of affirming their power in the organization. This commentary was followed up with a discussion that suggested that there was general agreement with the view that the conservative influence of faculty was a component of college politics and that faculty often slowed or blocked change.

Faculty disengagement. Further discussion also pointed out that faculty often did not participate in college social events or college-wide activities. Siobhan, Carol, and Meghan gave anecdotal evidence indicating low attendance and low participation rates of faculty in events such as college-wide recognition and leadership programs. It was suggested that this disengagement might be related to the relationship that faculty members might feel toward the college organization. Shannon's comments raised this issue:

> Shannon:...We see ourselves as independent academics, right? And so I have this ability to act independently in my practice of teaching. We decide as a group of academics about what our courses are going to look like. We have all of that control over that piece of our work and yet we have to still be employees of somebody and there's this sort of dissonance between the 2 roles because I am like an independent practitioner but I'm not—so the way I manage that is just be an independent practitioner. I don't care what the college says because there's no—as long as they keep sending me my pay cheque I'm going to do my job, right? and I don't have to be part of the large group because I'm an independent...You can't tell me what to do because I'm an independent practitioner.
>
> Mona: I've often thought that there's this certain socialization that academics have. So that when you have the discussion of "you're an employee" they can't have it. They don't know how to have it. They don't have that sense of ...someone pays and therefore some level of cooperation and loyalty is there. Well not everybody. Maybe because [I] come from a background, where you were a professional but you were clearly an employee, right?...This is the job that you took. That was just part of being part of a hierarchical organization.

> Meghan: I think sometimes we get all mixed up though, with this whole thing about input. Like, we're invited to give input to the organization, as a whole, and then we think that if that input isn't directly acted upon this moment then I'm mad at the people that are above me, because it didn't happen and I wanted it to happen that way. And I think we have to be careful with that always and for somebody like me, although I really like to be independent and autonomous, I still think I have a boss and if the boss tells me those are the rules then I have to follow them. That's part of getting my pay cheque. And that isn't a problem to me but I really think that's a problem to many people. That whole thing of "I told you what I wanted and you didn't do it so now I'm mad at you." And maybe we don't see the big picture sometimes. We are just so caught in our own worlds. (Group Meeting 1: 377-413)

In their efforts to come to terms with the conservative nature of faculty these group members offered their views of how they saw many faculty member's connection to the college organization. This followed from the concern regarding their observations of many faculty members' general disengagement from the college—not in their roles as teachers but in their roles as fully participating organizational members. The concept of loosely associated professionals provided a different motivation for involvement with an organization than did the concept of employee. As such, involvement in organizational activities designed to strengthen the organization would not be valued. Meghan's comments regarding input into decision-making processes supported her view that many faculty members view themselves in a rather insular role in the organization. She seemed to suggest that if faculty members' contributions to requests for input are not put into practice explicitly, those faculty members would tend to view the organization as unresponsive to their needs and they might tend, over time, to disengage from participation.

The research group members viewed their own roles as more connected to the college than many of their peers and they saw themselves as professionals in the employ of an institution, not in loose association with it. In terms of power structure, some group members seemed to suggest that this loosely associated professional model of involvement in the organization was a motivational factor in the conservative influence of faculty on the organization. Maintaining the status quo is likely related to a fundamental distrust on the part of faculty for the motivation behind proposed changes. Through this recognition the research group solidified its resolve in taking responsibility for shaping the organization as full participants in that organization. As became evident, later, the group used this understanding and resolve in defining the problem and proposing an action.

Power of the faculty association. As the group continued to probe the reasons for the conservative influence of faculty within the college organization several characteristics of a counterorganization and of the maintenance of power through manipulation and intimidation emerged. Conversation became focused on the faculty association rather than the general nature of faculty in the college. Given the successful track record of leadership amongst the research group members as evidenced by their tenure at the college and their continuation in formal roles of leadership, it was remarkable that each one had a story related to their fear of countering the negativity and cynicism of the faculty association. For example:

> Meghan: ...and this whole thing about paranoia is interesting because I beat myself up so much after those meetings because I think, 'why didn't you have the guts to say'—you know, come on, this is okay. 'Cause I get accused many times of being a 'Pollyanna' and being too...
>
> Carol: I have the same middle name. I'm actually starting to like being a Pollyanna (Group Meeting 1: 991-996)
>
> Meghan: ...I wish that sometimes I had the courage to stick up for...but I don't quite have the guts. But I wish I did...I try to make little remarks but they're always tiny and they're not as significant.
>
> Carol: ...They don't have as much impact as those other people's.
>
> Meghan: Yeah [our faculty association] does that to me too. In fact I don't think I'm going to go to their meetings anymore because I hate that feeling of cynicism and negativity that seem to be in the association so much of the time.
>
> Shannon: There seems to be a sense of personal risk. If you say something and someone leaps on you. We have agreed in this room that we're going to disagree respectfully. We don't have that same agreement in [faculty association meetings]. And so you don't know...We all have egos that we don't want to be embarrassed or chastised in front of our peers and that kind of thing...Part of our culture is sarcastic. We value the quick repartee.
>
> Carol:...And when I see [the faculty association] it's always on the defensive or reactionary response. That's unfortunate. That's probably part of the climate of the culture that we feel that we always have to react to something that's coming from the other side. But that's when you hear them. And otherwise when things are going well—we're not joyous and happy and spending time together. We band together loudly when we want to make a power comment to the other side but that's what it feels like. I'm sure that's not what it is. But that's why I don't go to [faculty association] meetings...
>
> Shannon:...I said something at a [faculty association] meeting and someone turned around and said, "Yeah, but you're such a Suzie Sunshine"...

> Mona: ...Sometimes it's like when you want to say it it's like facing a wall. It's just like a tidal wave, it's just huge and you feel like you could make your comment but the sound of the waves or whatever...that there's just no stopping the force. There's just no stopping it. It's just way too big and it's like sort of shouting to the wind. (Group Meeting 1: 1002-1088).

The faculty association at our college is the formal bargaining agent for the faculty collective. Because of its official role and college history, it has often taken strong stands in opposition to administration. This is particularly true if there is some concern that administrative decisions are not in the best interests of its members. This is the paranoia that Meghan referred to in her initial comments. Her view was that the faculty association most often looks for the negative ulterior motive. The references made to being accused of being a "Pollyanna" or a "Suzie Sunshine" may be related to Meghan's, Carol's, and Shannon's desire to convince the faculty association to support new ideas that are often blocked at the outset and that positive comments are not welcome at formal faculty association meetings. They seem to suggest that new ideas are not being considered on their own merits but rather on unspecified and suspected negative motives. Cynicism, negativity, lack of respectful exchange, sarcasm, and overwhelming strength are the words used to suggest the concern that the members of our group had for their involvement in the faculty association. All but one member of the group indicated that they felt powerless to intervene and that they lacked a sense of personal credibility in contributing to a change in the faculty association. Some level of disengagement with their formal association seemed to be their preferred approach in dealing with this issue. It is interesting to note that this is the same approach that they suggested their "loosely associated professional" peers used in their disengagement with the college organization. At one point in the conversation Siobhan suggested that the association was capable of doing positive things as well. While the other group members acknowledged such actions, they persisted with their view that the faculty association was characterized by negativity and cynicism.

Inner circle of power. The power relationships within the faculty association were also explored in that some members of our group felt that they were disenfranchised from the central core of the association. Carol suggested this in her comments:

> Carol: I was just wondering, when we talked about our perceptions in [faculty association]...it's my perception, maybe the way it is, because I don't consider myself in the 'in group' of [faculty association]. Do you know what I mean by 'in group'? The people who are totally, and have been for years, extremely involved in [faculty association]. There's lots of us that have been here for a long time and we know that core. And does that make it a different experience for me as a

> member? But not sitting on all of these committees together for years and years and years? Like I'm wondering if that's why I have that negative perception—is that I never felt a part of that group.
>
> Siobhan: There isn't an "in" group because the group changes...
>
> Carol: But the core to me doesn't. I could name the core and it hasn't changed. (Group Meeting 1: 1105-1116)

While Siobhan and Carol disagreed on the existence of the "in group" in the association, Carol's view persisted. This issue of a controlling group was further described when Carol described how she had been made to feel less credible than her counterparts in the association in this conversation:

> Shannon:...in connection to the piece about the employee versus the independent practitioner...in some ways this is the same thing. Because really our faculty association is a union right? And yet, so in my head...I'm autonomous and I'm all of these things....for me what's uncomfortable is that I get this group think kind of thing. And if you resisted it anyway.....well I wouldn't [laughter] And so then you do this thing where you think "Well I'll just quit going." And then you think "No I have to go." Because I have to show that there's more—but I don't say anything. So how do they know? They think I'm just going with the crowd.
>
> Carol: You don't voice against it because of that....it's not always just because I disagree with the issue or I strongly believe in that. I always get the impression when I have voiced my opinion—usually at a committee level—well you don't know enough of the history or you don't know enough of the—or you weren't there or you...I get that a lot –that feeling. Or, I'm a masters and you're a [bachelor] degree. It's that feeling all the time. And I don't do that to people so that annoys me to no end. It's just that I'm not paranoid enough because I'm not educated enough [laughter]. That's my feeling. If I had more letters [degrees] then I'd be more paranoid. I don't know. That's the feeling and that's a personal thing but I walk away from that. I don't have time for that. [Others: yeah]
>
> Mona: You just said something that struck me as really quite an interesting note with me. Are we really saying that it's very, very difficult to have credibility for anybody? For anybody to get credibility in this organization and its part of the problem? When you think of who would be credible enough to stand up to [faculty association], to make everybody listen—there's one person I can think of. One person who can stand up at a [faculty association] meeting and speak levelly and have everyone listen. (Group Meeting 1: 1148-1179)

Not being a member of the clique that seemed to control the faculty association was given as a reason for not feeling confident enough to speak out. The definition of "in group", however, seemed to differ amongst the participants. It appeared that there was some influence on the membership in this "in group" of faculty based on credentials. Longevity in the organization was seen to be a contributor but given the longevity of our research group members, and given that no one in the group felt that they were part of the "in group", this seemed not to be a deciding factor for the establishment of credibility amongst faculty. Siobhan was not so convinced of the existence of an "in-group" suggesting that the key members of the faculty association changed over time. This was challenged by other group members who maintained that the core group did not change significantly over time.

Credentialism. In an effort to define this credibility, the group agreed on one person that had established considerable credibility without seeming to be part of the controlling clique in the faculty association. We then described his characteristics, thereby summing up what we thought would contribute to the establishment of credibility—credibility that would provide the ability to challenge the status quo within faculty. We agreed that

> Various members: ...he has the right credentials [a PhD], he's articulate,...he doesn't ever seem to...be on one side or the other...he isn't over-emotional...he's passionate about what he's defending or discussing but in a very controlled way...so that's interesting. So that's what we value then—is analysis. ...Also it's his track record. (Group Meeting 1: 1197-1208)

It seemed that there were very few individuals that would command the same respect that would support the ability to influence, criticize, or challenge the faculty association. This conversation provided more information regarding sources of power particularly related to credentials, history and controlled passion. While Siobhan had resisted the idea of an "in group" she did demonstrate her sensitivity to the issue of power related to credentials in the following comment:

> Siobhan: I find it really sad...what you said about letters [credentials] are what make a person intelligent or not. ...when you change your role or change your letters—I mean, you're not a different person, kapow!...and some people feel very strongly that it makes a huge difference where—not just the credential...but where you get it from. (Group Meeting 1: 1318-1328)

While group members provided every indication that they did not support the concept of power related to academic credentials, they all acknowledged that they had observed this tendency. It is also probable that the group members underestimated their credibility with their peers. Two group members had doctoral degrees, three had master degrees, and all had considerable track records of success as Chairs. The credibility of the group was later proven in the presentation of the action plan to the faculty Professional Standards Committee. That committee did not challenge the plan but rather spent considerable time asking the opinion of our research group regarding the logistics of implementation.

Season for negativity. The initial negativity of the research group was later revisited in the second and third group meetings. Our group agreed that while there were some problems in the way that the people at the college related to each other, it was a very good place to work. The level of negativity and cynicism described in our earlier conversations was attributed partly to the time of year of the first group meeting. The first group meeting occurred in May when many faculty members are somewhat exhausted from their busiest time—the end of the winter term, marking term papers and final examinations, and giving final grades to students. In addition, April is the budget planning period for our college which has been very stressful over the past ten years as public financial support for post secondary education diminished substantially. The group members agreed that faculty were often quite "grouchy" at that time of year. I indicated in the second group meeting which took place four months after the first one, that I felt there was more openness to change in the senior administration group than there had been before and that there was "more understanding and…more willingness to look at alternatives" (Group Meeting 2: 394-404). This followed a change in administration structure and a change in the academic Vice President. There had also been a small change in the faculty association executive that was expected to have some influence on the climate of that organization and as a consequence the college climate. The group did not have any specific evidence to indicate any definite changes, however. They took a wait-and-see approach to characterizing these changes. Mona stated:

> Mona: One of the things that I think might be changing a little bit in our context that is different is [our association] and I don't know whether it will be different or not but it seems to be different, my sense is there's a different relationship for example between the association and senior [administration] now and those kind of things. I don't know whether it's going to change how we feel, remember 'cause we talked about feeling unable to speak up because we're afraid to get nailed. So it's hard to know how it's going to be so that may be one thing that might be changing…(Group Meeting 2: 359-365)

Mona's comments suggest that the conditions that she found intimidating in the faculty association were not solely related to the President of that association and that the culture of that organization was more pervasive. Mona's comment was indicative of some optimism in that conditions might change. Again, the power relationship between senior administration and the faculty association was an important consideration for

Mona. This relationship likely had a positive influence on how she saw herself relating to the organization.

Conclusion. The conversations that explored the planning context relating to power relationships in the college resulted in a shared understanding of some of the sources of power and how the participants in the research group related to those sources of power. While the influence attributed to the President and formal administration was recognized, the research group agreed that faculty also exerted considerable power. The power of faculty was characterized by the group as being conservative, reactionary, and protectionist and that the faculty association exhibited behaviours that some group members found intimidating. In trying to assess their relationships to these power structures, some group members felt like outsiders in the faculty association and expressed some disagreement with the importance that many faculty members place on academic credentials. Later in the project, group members suggested that there were some indications for possible positive changes in the future. The knowledge generated from this discussion was applied many times throughout the research project. In their second individual interviews, group members reported how this part of our research made a difference to them in the way they viewed their work and their relationship to the college.

Truth Telling

The issue of openness and honesty related to faculty peer evaluation was explored in relation to college micropolitics. The issue of truth telling was discussed in the context of power differentials, ability to influence, and maintenance of positive relationships. The participants considered differences between verbal and written input into peer evaluation, how they viewed their ability to be frank and open in those communications and how this all related to issues of accountability. This understanding of the lack of frank and open communication with peers became a compelling reason for proposing changes in the faculty evaluation process.

While it appeared to the research group members that there was value placed on open and honest communication, actual practice among peers at the college was perceived to fall far short of that espoused value.

> Shannon: You know in our department, we talk a lot about student stuff and to resolve conflict in [student] groups and their problems and then we act as if we do the same thing. And we lay out our values that say we do the same thing....we say that if there's an issue, go to the person who has it. But when it

> comes right down to it, we don't. And that's pretty common I think…(Group Meeting 1: 1347-1351)
>
> Siobhan: And some of it is the perception or the paranoia or whatever it is that you better not cross over the line because they'll get you, right? So you don't get to talk to them because you don't want to get on their bad side. (Group Meeting 1: 1357-1359)

Problems associated with peer evaluation and the reluctance to be completely open in faculty evaluation reports was discussed later in our conversations. The implication of this exchange was the participants' belief that there did not exist an atmosphere of trust and respectful critique among peers within faculty groups—either at the department level or within the faculty association.

Coded Chair reports. In the current system of faculty evaluation, the sources of data for the assessment of faculty are student feedback, peer feedback, Chair feedback and self assessment. The validity of the peer and Chair feedback was questioned by the research group. The following conversation is indicative of these concerns:

> Meghan: …Because you know that if you write some recommendations in the report that are fairly negative, you're going to be asked by your Dean why you wrote those.
>
> Siobhan: And then you don't write them.
>
> Meghan: You don't write them unless you're willing to stand behind them.
>
> Siobhan: It's real hard to be really negative, even when you're an external peer evaluator until you really know—I've written a letter of 'truth' and a letter of 'nicely said' years ago for someone in the department. When I was just a peer without a—
>
> Mona: Or you get caught in the bind of making it all behavioural and hope that the Dean can figure it out.
>
> Carol: Read between the lines.
>
> Shannon: …My Dean called me once about an evaluation I had written on someone—a Chair review. "I want to talk to you about this," she said. "I read all the ones you write and this one is different from the way you [usually] write. So what are you trying to tell me?" I thought I was being—it's very hard isn't it?
>
> Gerry: I see that as a big problem. Because it's all about truth telling. At some point if some of these folks are not meeting the standard, they shouldn't be here anymore.
>
> Carol: I guess that's my concern. If I'm writing because I'm concerned about being a peer of that person [rather] than what they're doing in my program is—

> Siobhan: Not extreme enough to be fired. I mean—those are easier. It's the middle ones—you're right, Carol. (Group Meeting 2: 720-751)

This discussion led to our agreement that there was a code that developed between Chairs and the Dean who had the responsibility to conduct the faculty evaluation. That code was established over time as the Dean became familiar with the writing style and observational comments of a Chair. Extrapolations were made just as much from what was said—with nuances and connotation provided by the descriptors used—as what was not said. As Mona pointed out, purely behavioural description with no assessment statements was one of those codes typically used by Chairs. Another instance of this was related later:

> Siobhan: ...[Meghan] you've worked with someone in my department, and what you say in words is different from what you write.
>
> Meghan: Yes. I write it much more politically correct. Yes, that's true. (Group Meeting 2: 1046-1049)

In an attempt to rationalize this issue related to truth telling Mona stated:

> Mona: A couple reactions. Sometimes when I listen to the talking I'm hearing—and from my own experience—sometimes we try and hide the power thing. Even though it's actually sort of going on. Maybe not hide it so much as lessen it. So that we have better working relationships. That's the transformative leadership. By it's very nature, that's what you're striving to do is to reduce the power differential. And if you're blunt with somebody, and say things inappropriately as I have had many times in the past, you alienate people. And that's really destructive to leadership. So it's not that we are not truth-telling it's that we are equally charged in a leadership role with relationship building and to thinking more in long term than in short term. So you're thinking about how to manage. Trying to balance how you manage in immediate situations that might be problematic. So it seems sensible to deal with this as a private issue. Much like you would in the classroom. Deal with it as a private issue but allow to go forward with much more vague public issue. (Group Meeting 2: 1060-1071)

These comments from Mona not only suggest a rationale for providing less than frank evaluative information in Chair reports, they also provide some insight into the ambiguity often experienced in the Chair role between supervision and leadership, and between relationship building and accountability. Mona suggested that it is important for her to minimize the power differential that arises as a result of providing evaluative feedback to fellow faculty members. She used this as a strategy to maintain strong interpersonal relationships that can persist over time and help in the enactment of transformational leadership—leadership that is collaborative and shared. She seemed to have equated blunt statements with inappropriate behaviour suggesting that the organizational culture does not support frank discussion. Mona implied that committing blunt commentary to paper is an example of inappropriate communication. In addition, this revealed Mona's perception that leadership is exerted through positive communication and that negative communication only serves to widen the power differential between individuals. This view likely influenced the research group's proposed action plan involving the establishment of a formalized mentorship relationship that had a developmental focus.

Constructive feedback preferred. Further discussion regarding the issue of open, honest evaluation is captured in this discussion:

> Mona: But even the ones that are real problems—what [evaluation reports] tend to be is almost...cold—almost become more barren. So in the sense of where it's not so much a lie, politically correct almost means barren or absence or...
>
> Meghan: I think it's more behavioural then. You tend to write it more behaviourally and not put the value interpretation on that. (Group Meeting 3: 51-56)

Both speakers suggest that the Chair report is not evaluative in the circumstance of a poor performance leaving any judgement of competence to the formal evaluator. This was contrasted to verbal exchanges that occur between faculty members. There was more potential for conveying more truthful and interpretation-laden critique in a more informal exchange. Meghan began by stating it this way:

> Meghan: But you know...this is my style, anyway—I can say it to their face. I can say, "You know this really didn't work. And this is why I think it didn't work." But I wouldn't put the why it didn't work in the report.
>
> Siobhan: And you probably wouldn't say this really didn't work, either.
>
> Meghan: I would normally say that—yeah I would say that.
>
> Carol: But we said that last meeting, too. Feedback face-to-face is different [from] what we pass on to our supervisor. So we are not saying that we are not giving constructive and professional feedback to people but we are not putting it in writing anywhere.
>
> Shannon: We don't write things that can be used to hit them over the head. If we do it face-to-face then it really—
>
> Meghan: And then your non-verbal is saying, "I still like you as a person. I respect you. I tried to help you. I care about you." (Group Meeting 3: 118-134)

This was a strong indication that there was a genuine interest in helping people to develop and showing that the people in our group were interested in expressing leadership from a very constructive frame of reference. Group members appeared to have adapted their practices of supervision and leadership in a way that would avoid conflict and maintain strong positive relationships. In addition, there was a clear vision of building relationships that would stand the test of time with a focus on longer term objectives:

> Mona: And we don't want to jeopardize things long term...[others: that's right, yeah]...and we talked about that last week. It comes back to, you know, this is somebody you want to be calling on [for] team work next week. (Group Meeting 3: 156-158)

Mona's comments indicated that one motivation behind providing incomplete and less critical input into peer evaluation reports might be related to the Chairs' desire to maintain positive relationships within their departments. A few group members added that there was not enough information upon which to base a full and fair assessment of teaching ability, discipline knowledge, or departmental contributions in the current practice of faculty evaluation. This was suggested as another motivation for the avoidance of frank, critical statements in peer review reports. Instead, a kind of guarded commentary was put on record.

Need for reliable peer evaluation. The group used this knowledge in the process of defining the problem that we wished to address. If the evaluator—usually the faculty member's Dean—was not familiar with the encoded messaging coming from the department Chair, it was possible that the problems being experienced by the new faculty member could be missed. The resulting lack of reliability of peer input into the faculty evaluation process was seen as a major problem, because without it, we perceived that there was a significant gap in the information required for a comprehensive performance evaluation. The summary that I provided was supported by the group:

> Gerry:...but my issue mostly relates to making accurate assessments about these folks and the work that they're doing. And making sure that the standards of the program are actually being upheld. That we are delivering a quality product and that the people doing the work are of quality. And I find that in my position of Dean, looking through all of these things, I feel so far removed, and you're telling me—and I know—that the information that I'm getting is politically correct information. So I think that the people that I must rely on the most to tell me exactly what's going on there....What we have is quite a flawed supervision model because it does not take into account the actual knowledge that exists right inside that department. The knowledge about what is happening in those classrooms with those students is there in the department and it is not flowing freely into the evaluation system.... (Group Meeting 2: 1099-1110)

This was further elaborated by Siobhan:

> Siobhan: But you know what it goes back to, is our first discussion on day one. Why aren't you getting that feedback. It's because of the culture and—paranoia is not the right word, it's too strong—but viewing that the mistrust—that's even too strong—but the uncertainty about what will be done with that information if we're honest. And Mona's point, for me, hit home because that's part of what you would do. You have long term relationships and you work with them on a day-to-day, and you want communication and you want a happy environment. You don't want people feeling sad, threatened, out of place. (Group Meeting 2: 1119-1140)

From these comments, the group determined that the more in-depth knowledge about how the performance of a new faculty member was important to the process of evaluation but that it was not being captured in the system of evaluation. From these comments I also became aware that my position at the college gave me an even more keen sense of accountability issues present in our institution. Siobhan's series of descriptors beginning with paranoia, then mistrust, and finally settling on uncertainty was an indication that while all these words held some element of reality for her, she appeared to be careful not to overstate the negative climate in which faculty evaluation took place. By implication, this would also suggest that she felt that the current process of faculty evaluation was not so terribly flawed that it was of no value.

Conclusion. The inability to provide frank and open negative commentary to peers in the process of evaluation seemed not so much related to truth telling as it did to withholding information in written reports. Participants explored their provision of two different forms of feedback. In person feedback seemed to be more comprehensive and would contain more frank criticism while written assessment would contain more bland and behavioural communication often devoid of evaluative commentary. The rationale provided by the participants was related to the desire to minimize power differentials, promote positive intra-departmental relationships, and maintain a positive frame of reference within which to enact their leadership. The research group then related this to the institutional expectation of accountability. Later in the study, personal expectations of accountability related to maintaining high standards in academic programs for which these individuals had considerable personal investment became more of a focus.

Anxiety for New Faculty

The dimensions of power and influence at the college were also seen by the research group to be related to the socialization of new faculty at the institution. New faculty seemed not to feel free to be themselves, to explore new approaches to teaching, and to take risks with innovative ideas. The participants recalled their experiences of entering the college and their work with new faculty in their roles as senior faculty and as Chairs. They speculated on the source of some of this anxiety and began to suggest ways of mitigating the situation in such a way that could still maintain standards in their programs. Communication of historical events, self-reflection, self-determination, and support for new faculty were all part of this conversation.

Student feedback dominates evaluation. The relative importance of student evaluation in assessing their performance seemed to be one of those factors that increased the anxiety experienced by new faculty. Siobhan began this conversation:

> Siobhan: You don't have to be perfect at the start, though. The probationary [faculty] look at those [student feedback instruments (SFIs)] and say to themselves, I don't want to do that because I know my SFIs count. The standard for a beginning person has to be different. And then you can say, hey, it's okay, we can work with you to do that.
>
> Shannon: I think it is.
>
> Siobhan: But it isn't. You hear instructors from all departments that lots of times when we talk with new people saying, "When I've got my continuous appointment I'm going to [do such and such], but right now I'm not going to take the risk." (Group Meeting 2: 1148-1157)

When describing the reactions of new faculty members attending the evaluation interview with the Dean, Carol stated: "I have to walk in there with those perfect report cards because the person doesn't know anything else about me." (Group Meeting 2: 1253). The view that SFI data was considered the most crucial in the tenure decision is likely related to the position relegated to peer feedback which is also included in the tenure portfolio. The lack of frank and open critique found in those peer reviews as suggested by the research group in its conversation regarding truth telling, brings into question their usefulness and even their validity. By default, then, student feedback becomes more important. Since many new college faculty are not experienced teachers, they are more likely to practice more traditional approaches to teaching. Innovation in the classroom is more likely to wait until tenure is granted when poorer student evaluations could be tolerated while the instructor experimented with different approaches. The research group further explored the anxiety of new faculty using anecdotal information from their years of experience in conducting observations, discussing performance with individuals, and writing the reports that made their way into evaluation portfolios. The group was not unified on the extent of risk aversion, but there was agreement that this was a significant dimension of a problem related to the tenure process.

Tenure process mythology. The role of history was also discussed relative to the issue of anxiety experienced by new faculty. Because most college history is communicated through an oral tradition and because there are many cultures within our organization, the facts of that history often differ from department to department. Our group discovered such discrepancies related to a number of stories regarding the tenure process as they recounted several anecdotes. Shannon began by saying:

> Shannon: Some of the fear comes from the historical stuff. The folk-lore that exists. You hear of the story of the person who did just fine, just fine, just fine, everything was going fine [in their semester evaluation reports], nobody gave her any feedback and *kaboom,* she was gone.
>
> Siobhan: I don't know that one.
>
> ....
>
> Meghan: I do think that the one that I was involved with was well documented along the way.
>
> Shannon: But that's an issue with the Dean....You shouldn't get to the continuous appointment hearing if your performance isn't meeting the standard.
>
> Carol: That shouldn't be where you find out you're gone.
>
> Shannon: The Dean should have intervened long before now. So maybe as time goes by and we have more—if we tell more stories about the positive things—
>
> Gerry: It's just that that doesn't make the news, right? The bad stories make the news....(Group Meeting 5: 218-237)

The story that Shannon told was unknown to Siobhan while Meghan indicated that she knew of a different instance. Implied here was the idea that such stories should be far outweighed by the retelling of positive experiences in the tenure process and that problems associated with the process in the past were not recent enough to have an effect on perceptions of current practice. Shannon summed it up this way: "If you think about all the continuous appointment hearings that have been held in the last fifteen years, isn't it interesting that the only ones we hear about are the three bad ones" (Group Meeting 5: 312-313). The information related to the history of faculty members undergoing the tenure process was seen by the group members to be a source of power—one that could be used to influence new faculty both negatively and positively.

The group indicated that the negative message was more prominent leading to an increase in the anxiety experienced by new faculty members.

Institutional discourse on evaluation. Further discussion revealed an essential paradox in the phraseology used in the current policy on faculty evaluation and the processes that were used to support it. The current policy stated that the process was a "self-evaluation process." This implied reflective practice and some individual freedom to act, but evaluation processes were largely prescribed and beyond the individual faculty control. My comments initiated this discussion:

> Gerry: ...We want [it] to be a self-evaluation. And then after we say it's a self-evaluation –and by the way, we're [administration] doing the computer stuff, we've got someone else doing the student evaluation for you, and the Chair and the peers write their reports—and so, here's all the stuff now it's your evaluation...[it] doesn't quite match somehow.
>
> Meghan: It really doesn't, does it? (Group Meeting 4: 209-215)

This view suggested that, with such regimentation, reflective practice was not well supported. Evaluation processes were largely performed by others. The current repetitive system of evaluation in which the first semester activities of acquiring feedback and providing a written report were repeated in five subsequent semesters was also thought to stifle reflective practice and innovation. The years of probation were seen as hoops to jump through and not a learning experience. Group members began voicing their recognition that important aspects of leadership for the Chair were the mentoring of new faculty and the promotion of reflective practice, but that the current environment evident during the three years of probation did not support growth, development, or experimentation.

Emphasis on reflective practice. A theme that kept recurring during our discussions was the desire to inculcate the value and process for reflective practice into the probationary period of new faculty at the college. The group's interest in reflective practice is exemplified by Mona's comments:

> Mona: Almost like a report on the self-reflective process. And how that was emerging. Because you feel safe with someone who is really self-reflective. They can have a bad day, you can give that observation but if the self-reflective stuff is happening, I know I relax with that. I kind of feel that it's in good hands. And the particular situation when it is terribly problematic, that was the piece that was missing—was that ability to do that self-reflective process. It was not there. (Group Meeting 4: 449-453)

Mona is suggesting that close supervision is not to be expected and that, in her role of Chair, she must trust that the faculty member will be self-regulated in the maintenance of standards. She can "feel safe", "relax with that", "feel that it's in good hands" when self-reflection has been clearly demonstrated. Her last comment relates to a problem with a former probationary member in her department where such self-reflection was not evident. By placing the responsibility for self-regulation on new faculty members and providing them with more control over their own evaluation process, the group anticipated that there would be a corresponding reduction in the anxiety experienced during the tenure process. I would also suggest that this was related to an underlying perception that power and influence in departments should be more shared, more democratic, and more collaborative. The expressed need of some group members to minimize power differentials and to avoid being seen as a "boss" also support this view.

More personal ownership. Other ways of increasing the control that new faculty had over their own practice and evaluation processes were also explored. One such opportunity presented itself during our project. Meghan and Carol were members of a Dean's advisory group (committee made up of a Dean and the Chairs and managers directly reporting to her/him) that had engaged in a discussion about the Chair role in faculty evaluation. Another Chair in that group made the suggestion that, rather than have the Chair write an evaluative report based on a classroom observation, it was more important for the faculty member being observed to do the writing based on a debriefing conversation following the visit. The report would include goals for development. Meghan and Carol described it this way:

> Meghan: George was just kind of talking about...the Chair role and the evaluation process, and it just seemed so clear, all of a sudden, to me about a better approach that he brought up. He brought it up and it just seemed to flow from his talk and that was what we do anyway—we sit down and talk with people and so after you go in and observe them, then you sit down and you talk about what went well, what didn't go well, what changes—that kind of conversation we had anyway. And then, instead of writing a report about that, the person that would have the pen would be the person that was being observed. And they then would record—these are things that I'm thinking about and the goals that I'm thinking about and the goals that I want to set forth for myself based on our joint conversation. So that would be the written record and the accountability framework. And then you both sign it off....You still have something written, that gives that accountability. On the other hand you're being more of a mentor. Your conversation is what you're focusing on. Which is, I think, what the value is anyway—is in the conversation. And you want that person to own their goals...
>
> Carol:...it would take away that code thing that we talked about at this table and you have that very open discussion....(Group Meeting 4: 30-44)

Conversation following a peer or Chair observation was further supported by:

> Meghan: Don't you find, so often, though, you'll have notes from your peer visit, and you'll think that you really understand that but if you have to talk to the person, it would not have made any sense at all, and then all of a sudden they say something and you think, oh, that's why—and I don't want that in the report because it's silly. Like I shouldn't have had it there in the first place. It evolves—it's a conversation.
>
> Shannon: What if it evolves to a place that you hadn't intended it to go. So let's say that we were going through this debriefing and they established their goals and you looked at them and you thought that they didn't hear me yet. So you just keep at it until—what if you never get to a point where they can hear what you have to say?
>
> Meghan: Then I think you write—you go back—then you have to write it down yourself because when you're a Chair you know you're going to have to write a report in the end.
>
> Shannon: But I think you should have to do something right at that stage—she couldn't agree on the goal-setting.
>
> Carol: Otherwise she shouldn't be signing it. If they're not hearing you, then you shouldn't.
>
> Shannon: Or you should make a comment that you disagree with their goals based on—
>
> Meghan: But maybe there needs to be a spot on the bottom that says—observer comments...And they can sign them off and not agree with them. That's okay. But we both signed this off. This is a point at which we disagree. I think that would be okay too.
>
> Shannon: I think it would be important to have that. (Group Meeting 4: 298-327)

This exchange provides further insight into the motivation to move the responsibility and control over the process of self-evaluation to the incoming faculty members. It shows the commitment of group members to the concepts of mentorship, collaboration, conversation, and development. The group's belief that knowledge is socially constructed is also embedded in this discussion in the suggestion that the final results are not and should not be anticipated. Instead, the final result grows from the interaction between the new faculty member and the department Chair. The new faculty member would feel empowered by drafting the observation report and the peer or Chair would be able to engage in a conversation following the observation that was viewed as far more beneficial by focussing on development.

The shift of the ownership of the evaluation process to the new faculty members and the encouragement to move to a more reflective form of practice were further explored when Meghan stated:

> Meghan: I know that when we're teaching students how to [work with] at-risk families and how to help the family set their own goals, one of the things that we always say to them is, "The person that holds the pen is really the one you are giving the power to"...because if that person is actually writing their own goals, and they're holding the pen then they're owning that and it's empowering them.
>
> Gerry: it also brings to mind the whole concept of moving to reflective practice.
>
> Others: Yeah, huge, huge. (Group Meeting 4: 190-199)

This concept of personal ownership addressed the issue of peers and Chairs writing observation reports in code, it helped to focus on goals for future development, it placed ownership with the new faculty member, and it promoted the concept of reflective practice. The process also created space and time for authentic conversation centred on excellence in teaching. Finally, this small change in the way that peer or Chair supervision would be handled might have some impact on the Chair workload. Shannon stated:

> Shannon: And that would address the whole concern about workload too because the Chair wouldn't be writing up all those reports...So I could replace the time to write it up with the conversation. (Group Meeting 4: 54-58)

Recent discussions in Shannon's Dean's advisory group had indicated that Chair workload was seen as a barrier to any changes in the faculty evaluation process. She indicated that the approach suggested by Meghan and Carol would be a potential solution to some of those concerns.

Feminine leadership style. There also appeared to be a gender-related preference within the group for a more feminine approach to leadership relative to new faculty. According to Morgan (2006) approaches of empathy, nurturing, and cooperation are characteristics favoured by women over the traditional male stereotypes of logic, exploitation, independence, and competition. This became more evident as the study progressed with the suggestion of establishing a formal mentoring relationship between new faculty and department Chairs. This is more fully discussed in the next chapter but it is important to point out that this approach was also seen as a way of reducing the anxiety of incoming faculty. The requirement to meet the more male-oriented expectations for accountability also formed part of this discussion. It seems that these

Chairs' experiences of balancing their preferred ways of managing and leading within a male-dominated managerial structure were applied almost automatically in this situation.

Conclusion. Research group members suggested that anxiety observed in new faculty members might be related to the over-reliance on student feedback, the mythology surrounding the tenure process, the lack of control that they felt over the evaluation process, and the lack of support that they experienced. While the information provided was not systematic or comprehensive, relying primarily on anecdotes, the group members seemed to form a consensus regarding their conclusions. It was suggested that if new faculty members were assisted in the development of self-reflective practice, if they felt more ownership, and if they were provided with more assistance in the form of mentorship, the anxiety levels that they were currently experiencing could be reduced. The shift of power and control from institution and hierarchy to individuals was seen as a means of reducing power differentials and reducing the anxiety of individuals.

Micropolitics and the Development of an Action Plan

Various components of the proposed action plan for reforming supervision process in the college were accumulated throughout the group's analysis of the planning context and throughout the exploration of roles, expectations, and personal relationships with those roles and expectations. As the research group deepened its understanding through conversation, a strategy developed for influencing institutional change and a final draft of the proposal developed. Before the final draft, the group had agreed that a new approach to the tenure process should be established that would include more involvement of department Chairs, more self-reflection, mentorship from senior faculty, more ownership by new faculty in their own evaluation, and more effective ways of providing authentic and developmental critique to new faculty members. In this section, I will concentrate on the influence that the knowledge generated during our micropolitical analysis had on shaping the action plan strategy that was finally employed by the research group. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the action research process in the development of a strategy for change.

Context and Strategy

In addition to assessing the planning context from the point of view of power and influence issues related to providing authentic and frank input into evaluation and the perceptions of new faculty as they entered the college, the analysis considered the general college environment related to power structures that might affect a change project. Since faculty evaluation and probation are formal processes at our college, it was critical for us to influence change at the college-wide level. Our research group used the knowledge that had been built regarding the planning context conversation in deciding how to effectively design a strategy that would result in a new tenure process. Conversations included the determination of where the group would have the greatest influence in the organization and considerations of the credibility of our research group.

Strategies for influencing change. Because the research group was proposing a solution that would challenge the status quo, it considered the need to influence those that had the power to make changes and those who were in a credible position to influence change. The conversations in Group Meetings 4 and 5 freely moved between developing a solution and how we would influence the change. The group started by suggesting that we try to influence the Professional Standards Committee that was currently involved in changing the faculty evaluation policy. The Professional Standards Committee was a formally established standing committee including administration and faculty that was charged with the oversight of faculty evaluation policy. The topic was introduced this way:

> Meghan: Professional standards would have to be part of that, right?
> Shannon: If we wanted to try it to see how it would work, we would have to get permission from them to allow a demonstration. So it would be acceptable for their continuous appointment [process]. (Group Meeting 4: 130-133)

And later:

> Shannon: I'm really curious about this process. I'd like to try it. I just don't know—what do we do now? We have two or three probationary people [in my department] who would probably be delighted—they're well past their first term but they might be quite interested in going through this. (Group Meeting 4: 528-530)

The first comment indicates the desire to use bureaucratic structure to legitimize the change in practice. Seeking permission to act was not questioned by other group members indicating that the change process they wished to engage in would have to be congruent with bureaucratic institutional norms of behaviour. Shannon's later comment indicating her enthusiasm for participation in the demonstration project suggests her commitment to the change proposal. A demonstration of the positive influence on the tenure process in a real setting was seen as a strategy to gain support from others in the institution. This approach also implies a belief that logic, rationality, and facts would eventually convince everyone that the proposal would produce better results.

Credibility of the research group. Further conversation focused on a political analysis related to power and credibility involving the use of the demonstration project approach. Mona began the conversation:

> Mona: Which is about, typically, when new things come forward, how the institution reacts. We're a very like-minded group.
>
> Shannon: We're not representative, I don't think.
>
> Mona: Like-minded in a number of ways. Comfortable with mentoring would be a big part of it. So that when we look at taking it on, it seems like fun rather than painful and uncomfortable.
>
> Shannon: Really focused on development as opposed to evaluation. It isn't about catching people it's about assisting people.
>
> Mona: Comfortable with facilitating strengths...that's a skill set—as well as an interest. I think we might be assuming too much if we assume it's shared everywhere.
>
> Carol: It's not shared everywhere.
>
> Shannon: Actually in [my Dean's advisory group], I was astonished at who went "ugh." I really was. (Group Meeting 4: 548-564)

Mona had suggested that the ability to influence change was related to how the rest of the college would perceive the group proposing the change. In her view, the group's apparent like-mindedness in their developmental approach to evaluation might negatively affect their credibility. Shannon's and Carol's comments supported Mona's concern by suggesting that many in the institution would not share their enthusiasm for this approach thus creating a barrier to acceptance. It is interesting to note that Mona tended to view development in opposition to evaluation. This dichotomy was likely related to a connotation of evaluation as an administrative and bureaucratic process that is depersonalized and not focused on improvement. Evaluation, in her view would be associated with summative processes rather than formative ones. The apparent tension between these two views was likely experienced by Mona in her role as a Chair.

The group continued to discuss a strategy that would address the need to establish credibility. Carol began:

> Carol: But what we're asking at this point is the opportunity to try something—we're not introducing something—we're asking for the opportunity to try it.

> Mona: Oh I think you're right but if there are ways, if we start something, we start thinking about it even now, we're also able to see the bigger picture too. So it's not like we've come with a great plan that we've tried—it worked for us—do you know what I'm saying?
>
> Gerry: ...we've tried this, it works—[can we] sell that any better than selling the idea before you do it?
>
> Mona: But maybe we do trial stuff—but maybe there are things where Chairs can start talking about, in more detail, their mentorship roles. So that they begin to sort of do a mind shift or create some space there for the idea to slip into when it's ready. (Group Meeting 4: 566-578)

These comments indicate the concern that proposing an institution-wide change would not be accepted in what had already been described as a conservative environment. Group members seemed to think that there was enough support for innovation that a demonstration project would be met with some acceptance. Mona suggested that a demonstration project would provide time for conversation about the mentorship role of Chairs and provide a legitimate space in the organization for the consideration of the developmental approach envisioned by the group. This is an indication that the research group was beginning to gain insight into the importance of conversation in influencing change in an organization.

Demonstration Project

The first action plan strategy developed by the group was to demonstrate the benefits of the proposed changes in the tenure process by working with a small number of departments that either volunteered to participate or who would be asked to participate. The demonstration project plan seemed to group members to be a viable approach in encouraging more widespread acceptance of the proposal in the institution. Further discussion suggested that this process would be very slow. In addition, it was suggested that in a political environment where power, influence, and control were the currency of transactions, there was some doubt that logic, facts, and proof would be strong enough to actually result in institutional change. An analysis of this part of the action plan development reveals the research group's use of their knowledge of the planning context and suggests how the group felt it could apply political expertise to influence the outcome of the project. It also demonstrates the process of recognizing an opportunity to act suggesting that both timing and knowledge were important in the final outcome of the project.

Time for building support. Mona's suggestion that the demonstration project would provide time for other Chairs to discuss their roles of mentorship and to become accustomed to the idea seemed to have merit, because it also supported the building of coalitions and support groups. Over time, these might form a strong enough power block to change the institution. With this in mind, the group attempted to suggest departments that would be good candidates for the demonstration project:

> Shannon: Something that strikes me that…if we decide to do something and the time comes to do a demonstration that we be very strategic about where we do the demonstration. And what I'm thinking is that [my department] would not be the appropriate place because it wouldn't be sellable to the rest of the college—like to the hard-nosed [departments] because they—
>
> Carol:…all these human services [departments]. We like people.
>
> Shannon: So we'd have to be really cautious to make sure that we demonstrated in a place—or a mix of places—
>
> Meghan: A mix of places would be better…Find the biggest cynics and sell it to them individually….I'm kind of like [Shannon's department]. I'm seeing this too 'Pollyanna-ish'. I know I am. I can see strengths that, like that's my biggest problem going into the classroom. I can see that I'm really strengths-based and I really have to dig to find—and I'm a pretty good learner so I can learn from lots of different kinds of people, and it doesn't bother me if people are doing things sometimes that I might not—…
>
> Gerry: But I'm not so sure about that Pollyanna thing. I would not call myself a Pollyanna.
>
> Shannon: No, and there's nobody in the institution that would call you a Pollyanna. (laughter)
>
> Gerry: But I can see a lot of promise in this. Like I wouldn't put myself in the camp of [Shannon's department].
>
> Shannon: That's what I'm saying, it's people like you—if you believe in it—then people like you would give it credibility. Where people like you (pointing to Meghan) or I—oh they just think—touchy, feely….That's what I'm thinking. Am I being too honest here? (Group Meeting 4: 636-684)

This discussion of tactics by the research group utilized the knowledge that the college was a collection of somewhat dissimilar cultures. From Carol's comments that the research group differed from some other groups in that "we like people" implies that fostering development and mentorship roles would not be met with instant acceptance throughout the institution. This interpretation might be extended further to suggest that gender politics might be related to the acceptance of a more feminine approach to the management of evaluation characterized by development, support and collaboration in a male-oriented managerial culture in the organization. It seemed that I was associated with male-oriented organizational power structure and that my very involvement would lend some credibility to the approaches being recommended. Thus, the group members' preferred style of supervision was not seen as a perfect fit with the prevailing institutional culture.

Institutional opportunity. While the research group tended to agree on the demonstration project approach, our commitment did not persist after further discussion revealed the opportunity currently available to us. Considering that the tenure process was three years long and that there would have to be an evaluation of the demonstration project following its application, any change that would affect the whole organization beginning with a demonstration project would take over five years. We searched for a more rapid way of introducing the change. I suggested earlier that since the organization was in a state of flux regarding the evaluation of faculty, we might consider a college-wide demonstration project by influencing a change in the policy and prompting the whole institution to experiment with the new process. This proposition gained support as the conversation continued:

> Mona: I'm with Gerry, though, I think this might be really good timing to just move it into the whole evaluation process...
>
> Carol: It's already there.
>
> Gerry: It wouldn't hurt us to bring it to that forum. I think there might be some openness in the [professional standards] committee because none of them are Chairs.
>
> Shannon: Could we go to them with this kind of an idea? Or would we have to have a more fully developed idea?
>
> Gerry: We might want to have at least a one-pager kind of outline and then maybe talk to them at the committee. I'm thinking that we should write something down around this. What if we brought it to that committee? (Group Meeting 4: 652-664)

This exchange suggested that there might have existed an opportunity to influence a change process that was already underway. It also raised the consideration that the membership of the standards committee might be more supportive than other venues in the college. A new strategy began to emerge that would not require the research group to engage in a long process of coalition building, structuring a demonstration project, evaluating that project, and still be left with convincing the standards committee to adopt the change in policy. This approach also conveniently avoided a direct interaction with the faculty association. The research group shifted its attention to the creation of a strategy that would influence the Professional Standards Committee to support the proposed changes in the tenure process.

Conclusion. The process of planning the demonstration project approach to the process of change in the college provided the research group with an avenue to further explore the potential barriers to incorporating the proposed changes into practice. It demonstrated the political strategy of gaining support in small, localized areas and building coalitions that could eventually provide enough strength to overcome institutional inertia. Given the time commitment required to use the demonstration project approach and given the opportunity to act at the institution-wide level, a new strategy was developed. Having chosen the approach, the research group was able to tailor their specific tactics and messages to fit the audience that would receive the proposal.

Presenting the Plan

The research group selected the Professional Standards Committee as the most likely place in the college to influence change successfully and focused its attention on the strategy for delivering the message. The research group continued to focus on enhancing credibility by improving the proposal's face validity. The nature of the Professional Standards Committee was explored in order to tailor the message to that audience. In addition, the group focused on the approach that might be taken in follow-up activity that would further institutionalize the change.

Considering the audience. As the research group began to consider the reception that it would receive as it presented the proposal, it was suggested that the Professional Standards Committee might be very concerned about the lack of rigour in our proposed process. Shannon stated: "...but maybe that's good...We are very like-minded...so we need some people to kind of challenge that. (Group Meeting 4: 704-706). Shannon's comment demonstrated her commitment to collaboration and continuing development of knowledge that had characterized much of the interaction in the research group. In considering the presentation to the Professional Standards Committee, the issue of its complexity arose. Carol suggested:

> Carol: Maybe we need to develop something and propose it and not worry about how it weighs up to the old one because they don't like [the old one] anyway. I don't know that we have to create more pieces to something that we really

> believe is a valuable process—the mentoring year…I don't know that we have to find a way to build rigour into it.
>
> Gerry: Maybe we can trust the committee to do it….
>
> Meghan: …Maybe they will come up with something.
>
> Gerry: Maybe we just propose what we think are the important pieces that should be in there and maybe we don't present the complete picture. Maybe it's not everything but we think these things should be built in. What's happened [so far] with the process piece [of the new policy] is there have been no changes proposed [by the committee] for the probationary [faculty]. There is nothing different in it….And yet we got lots of feedback talking about how repetitive it was, how little it helped—
>
> Shannon: And how limiting it was because you're so conscious about making sure that we had good reports that that was what we were paying attention to. So we weren't being creative, we weren't doing those things because we were just worrying about whether we got continuous and then we could be creative [after we got tenure]. (Group Meeting 4: 1068-1091)

Implied in this exchange was the recognition that the proposal for change involved only the tenure process section within the overall policy under review. In addition, there was a desire that the basic principles upon which the proposal was based should be emphasized. Again, the opportunity for action was pointed out in that there were, so far, no proposals for changing the tenure process. Shannon's comment reinforced the group's rationale for pursuing the change. Through this discussion, we determined that we probably did not have to present every detail of a solution but that we should carefully justify the reasons for changing the process around new full time faculty. Without stating it, there also seemed to be some recognition in the group that the Professional Standards Committee should retain ownership of the overall policy especially if they would be expected to defend the proposed changes.

Who speaks for us? Since it would take some time for us to draft a proposal and to submit it, we felt that we should warn the Professional Standards Committee that we were bringing a proposal forward. I asked:

> Gerry: Would it be safe for me to let the standards committee know that we are going to come with something?
>
> All: Yeah. Sure.
>
> Carol: I'm just wondering about the climate. Should it be coming from [Gerry]?
>
> Shannon: Is it better if it comes from one of us?

> Carol: Do you know what I mean Gerry? In the role you're in right now (academic Vice President) and what this group is about for you, is that where, should it come from you?
>
> Gerry: It's not a good idea in some ways because I represent something quite different on that committee than just a member.
>
> Carol: I think you do.
>
> Shannon: So it would be better to invite one of us. (Group Meeting 4: 1195-1213)

Because of the role that I played at the time (academic Vice President) there was concern that if I brought this proposal forward to a committee that was largely made up of faculty members, the proposal might not receive a fair hearing. A hint that this was not always true was suggested by Mona when she said,

> Mona: It's so interesting how committees can so change their flavour. That was like the funnest committee. It doesn't sound like—
>
> Gerry: The culture of that committee changes with the membership. (Group meeting 4: 1241-1244)

A few months later, as we began drafting our proposal, discussion focused on the standards committee indicating that there seemed to be openness to consider new, well thought out ideas.

> Meghan: …I just want to reflect one more bit on this last part, when you said about the culture and how things change. And it's interesting to me that [my Dean] presented that (a proposal for a change in peer observation reports) and it was approved. Because in the culture, right now [my Dean's] views are not always accepted in the culture we're living in.
>
> Shannon: Aren't always accepted? (laughter).
>
> Meghan: And so it was interesting to me that she presented that and faculty [in the standards committee] supported it. So that says to me—
>
> Shannon: The culture in the standards committee is very different. It really is.
>
> Meghan: Yeah, I've been in there too. So I know what you mean. But still I think that's interesting. Because maybe that's a sign that people will start to accept her ideas.
>
> Siobhan: The Professional Standards Committee in not a good committee to judge by, I wouldn't say.
>
> Meghan: They can also be negative if they felt like it.

> Shannon: I think that's a really good point, Siobhan. I think we need to look at our Professional Standards Committee. Naturally it attracts people of a certain type, right? And so I'm not sure—it's like what we were talking about last time. Well of course we would think it's okay because we're into that touchy, feely stuff. People who go on the standards committee are often people who come from our kind of view of the world.
>
> Meghan: ...so...I think it was truly based on the concept. Because I think sometimes personalities get in the way. And I don't think they did in that case. I think people were really looking at the concept. (Group Meeting 5: 351-384)

Three characteristics of the Professional Standards Committee had been suggested. First, Meghan viewed the committee as less influenced by the administration/faculty divide than some other groups at the college. By implication, it was not as likely to be as interested in rejecting a change proposal at first sight. Second, she suggested that the committee seemed to be willing to consider proposals on their own merits disregarding the source. Finally, Shannon's suggestion that the committee often attracts people that have similar values to the ones held by our research group provided more support for the approach being suggested. This last comment also suggested that less detail would likely have to be provided in the proposal since there would be an expectation that the committee would share a common understanding with our research group. The brevity of the proposal document (Appendix D) is an indication of this strategy.

The research group decided that I would draft the proposal and that we would meet to edit the draft and strategize our approach to the Professional Standards Committee. Throughout our discussions the importance of conversation between our research group and the Professional Standards Committee was reinforced. In addition, the credibility of our research group became an important consideration. In preparation for our meeting with the standards committee, Siobhan suggested that we meet to discuss our presentation:

> Siobhan: And then we would know what we are actually saying. Because otherwise we'd be saying, well, in probationary year—oh yeah—but we changed that—don't forget—
>
> Shannon: And then we look foolish. (Group Meeting 5: 1113-1116)

These comments related to our conversations regarding credibility as an important source of power. It was important for us to appear well-prepared, analytical, and articulate. The strategy then, was to present a coherent case for change to a group that would likely be receptive and who had the power to cause an institutional change.

Selling the plan. The characterization of the proposal as a bold new plan was proposed as a strategy for presentation. The conversation was enthusiastic on this point:

> Siobhan: I like big, new, bold.
>
> Gerry: We have a huge value proposition for the college.
>
> Others: Yes. Yeah.
>
> Gerry: And just see if we can convince—well we can probably let the committee stew on the money part. I don't think we have to solve it all.
>
> Others: No. No.
>
> Gerry: But what we are trying to do here is answer some of the issues that we have felt—so it answers a few issues for me—and one of them is the leadership/supervision kind of role of the Chair and how that can be resolved in our institution in our current culture and the culture we want to develop into. It also talks about the evaluation process becoming more meaningful for the people that are being impacted. And starting with the probationary/sessional positions because that has long term impact in the institution.
>
> Others: Yeah. ...
>
> Siobhan: And a big selling [feature] is that lots of average people you know you're going to be okay to move on to be better than average in this plan. And not in the [old] one.
>
> Meghan: That's a good point.
>
> Carol: That's a good selling point.
>
> Siobhan: For our department that would be the case.
>
> Gerry: Just simply becoming competent is not the objective here.
>
> Others: Yeah.
>
> Gerry: The idea is that you are in constant improvement.
>
> Siobhan: Yeah. In a non-threatening way. I think our people are competent because they taught x number of years, but tend to be just like all of us. We can do better all the time. (Group Meeting 5: 1132-1160).

The group, at this point, was rehearsing a script that would try to "sell" the committee on the merits of our proposal. There was enthusiasm for the change and a willingness to see it through—even though the time frame for implementation would be at least 3 years. Shannon said, "It might be fun to go back on the Professional Standards

Committee to get the changes in" (Group Meeting 6: 480). Following the presentation of our proposal to the Professional Standards Committee, potential further actions of our group were considered. From this conversation, our commitment to continue to influence adoption of our solution was evident:

> Gerry: I think that if we wanted to have more influence on what's going to happen with this, we should make sure that a couple of us, at least, are at those other Deans' meetings, if we can.
>
> Shannon: Well, Siobhan and I are both on one.
>
> Siobhan: We have two in our group.
>
> Gerry: And that's a plus.
>
> Meghan: And who's on the other one?
>
> All: None of us.
>
> Siobhan: But they have to have it on the agenda.
>
> Shannon: But you can certainly tell [the Dean] that she can invite us....I have a question about the expectations would be around our role in relation to that. I guess I would see us go and respond to questions and talk about why did we do this. Not to be cheerleaders for it or try to sell people on it or any of those kind of things. I just need to say that out loud to make it clear that I don't think we should be left to try to sell it. Siobhan and I should not be responsible for trying to sell it to [our Dean's] group. What we can do is talk about how—
>
> Meghan: And that's how I did it. I just went through the document and said this is—
>
> Shannon: And this is what we said about that.
>
> Gerry: I think that's the expectation, anyway.
>
> Meghan: I didn't promote it but I did say that I really liked it.
>
> Shannon: And that's fair enough. But I don't think it's our job to sell it. (Group Meeting 7: 138-170

Group members were indicating that they were interested in continuing to support the plan after initial acceptance. This could occur in their day-to-day work but they were also willing to provide information and support when called upon by various college groups or individuals to do so. "Cheerleading" and "selling" were seen as counter-productive. Describing the research process and indicating support for the proposed changes were clearly part of "selling" the concept as was the scripting of our conversation with the standards committee. In placing some context around this, the sensitivity of at least two group members to being seen as "Pollyannas" should be considered. This would seem to be both a defensive and a strategic decision to avoid the cynical response that they had reported experiencing in the past—defensive in the sense of protecting egos and strategic in the sense of not side-tracking the proposal through cynicism and protection of control positions.. The stronger the effort to convince others the stronger would be the force of opposition. If a second action research cycle was embarked upon, further research could explore the motivation behind the decision to avoid being seen as cheerleaders.

Conclusion. In approaching the problem and change strategy from an action research perspective, the research group was able to consider its planning context, define the problem, and strategize its approach to influence change in a systematic yet informal process. Without an external provision of a clear goal other than defining the general area of concern, the group was able to incorporate their knowledge of the college environment into their planning process. While the group did not formally adopt a micropolitical analysis frame of reference, they did approach the context analysis using many terms and characteristics associated with that theoretical construct. Power, influence, coalition building, and conflicting interests were all considered as the project plan developed. The research group used its constructed knowledge to define the problem and to take action.

Discussion

Micropolitical analysis was useful in the conduct of this action research project in that it helped the group to share and build knowledge during all phases of the action research cycle—namely the context analysis, problem identification, the formulation for a plan of action, and in evaluating the initial action. The concise and straightforward analytical framework for micropolitics presented by Morgan (2006) was used to analyze the conversation of our group, and the commentary throughout this chapter is based on that framework. However, it is important to point out that the research group did not discuss the topics of "micropolitics," the Morgan framework, or the application of an analytical framework in our conversations. I applied the analytical framework following completion of the project in order to provide structure for this report. The following discussion relates the work of the research group to interests, conflict, and power relationships that formed the conversations that analyzed the planning context and the strategies employed in the actions taken by the group.

College Culture

Initially, the group established that they were not able to characterize a college-wide culture or political environment. Group members described their personal experiences over time and in various interactions with a variety of different groups throughout the institution and discovered that they did not share a common view of organizational culture or of the micropolitics within it. This is consistent with Morgan's assertion that even the most global forms of political structure such as: autocracy, bureaucracy, technocracy, codetermination, representative democracy, and direct democracy cannot characterize a whole organization and that organizations often employ a number of these kinds of "rule" at some point in time or in some particular subunit within the organization (Morgan, 2006). He suggests that:

> In contrast with the view that organizations are integrated rational enterprises pursuing a common goal, the political metaphor encourages us to see organizations as loose networks of people with divergent interests who gather together for the sake of expediency. (p. 161)

For the most part, our college could be said to operate within the rules of a bureaucracy. Power and influence are largely defined by formal authority related to position with day-to-day functioning occurring through practices prescribed by policy and rules. This is consistent with the views of Chu (2006) who suggested that bureaucracy is the dominant structure of campus organizations which gives rise naturally to differences in authority and power creating an environment that is conducive to political activity. The research group often referenced these formal structures and finally implemented a plan that influenced a change in the rules of the organization. The dominant political structures of various subunits within the institution, however, are much more variable ranging all the way from direct democracy to autocracy which further creates a field of differing interests, values, and power relationships. Ball (1987) contended that the "uneasy middle ground" between bureaucratic and democratic organization occupied by schools provided the backdrop and conditions suitable for political activity and thus analysis using a micropolitical model. Because community colleges resemble schools in that their mandate is largely that of teaching, occupying the middle ground between "product producing systems and public service institutions" (Ball, 1987, p. 9), I believe that much of Ball's work relating micropolitics to school organizations is instructive in the setting of this study. This is further supported by Blase and Anderson (1995), Achinstein (2002), Chu (2006), Cooper et al. (2005), and Milliken (2001) who used similar analytical models of micropolitics to study various aspects of both schools and colleges.

Conflicting Interests

Divergence of interests became apparent as the research group explored the context for planning and the interests within the group itself. Morgan (2006) described interests as "predispositions embracing goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations and inclinations that lead a person to act in one way rather than another" (p. 157). While there is some evidence of this in the data presented in this chapter, this is more apparent in the next chapter where I discuss the differing values and motivations expressed by the members of our group related to the role of department Chair. Conversations focused on differing interests within the college gave rise to the demonstration project strategy and provided the context for positioning our group within the college organization. The group restated many times that we were like-minded relative to our developmental focus for the faculty tenure process and in our support for the values related to mentorship and collaboration. Some members of our group also stated that we were not likely representative of the college in that respect. Although half in jest, there were suggestions that "we *like* people" and would likely be characterized as overly emotionally committed to affective outcomes when compared to those whose primary allegiance was to discipline, scholarship, or competitive advantage. This potential conflict was suggested as problematic by group members even using the demonstration project strategy. This likely contributed to the decision to take a more politically motivated form of action. Since conflicting values, motivations, and interests lend themselves to political action, our study was consistent with the views of many authors in the field of micropolitics (Ball, 1987; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Achinstein, 2002; Cooper et al., 2005; Milliken, 2001; Morgan, 2006).

Power and Influence

While the notions of conflict, variant values, and differing interests were considered important, power and influence in the institution became a focus of attention. This was alluded to in the conversations related to the knowledge that the members stated they had gained as a result of their experiences as department Chairs. Two sources of power were intertwined in these conversations since they related to both the use of knowledge and information and formal authority (Morgan, 2006; Milliken, 2001; Chu, 2006). This also supports the earlier claim that the nature of bureaucracy and its inherent power and authority differentials is an environmental context conducive to political activity. The power differential related to my position in the group warrants consideration in this study. As the senior academic officer, I was the second-in-command at the institution. This position was two levels of authority removed from the Chair position in that Chairs did not directly report to me but their supervisors did. In the individual interviews held with the group members at the outset and at the conclusion of the project, all members agreed that the power exerted by me was more related to my initiation of the project and my role as a graduate student. The group gave me permission (implicitly) to continue my role as a group facilitator. In addition, there was recognition by at least two group members in my ability to influence senior management to support our project. It was pointed out by Meghan in her final interview that having me in our group was an advantage because she did not have to be concerned with support from the administration group at the college because of my position. Thus, one power group within the college was being "looked after" by my very presence in the group. This, in itself was a political act although not an explicit one. Position and formal authority seemed to be of lesser importance to the group than other sources of power and subsequent potential control. For example, the faculty association was suggested as potentially more powerful than the President because of its ability to successfully block change. The rapid change in support for the President was another indication that power of position and formal authority seemed of less importance than other sources of power.

Counterorganization

Early in the study, the group was quite concerned about the power and the strength of control exerted by a relatively small group that represented the faculty association. Morgan (2006) describes this phenomenon as being related to the power of a counterorganization. Given the history of the college that I outlined in the context section of this study, it is not surprising that "...[w]henever a group of people manages to build a concentration of power in relatively few hands it is not uncommon for opposing forces to coordinate their actions to create a rival power bloc..." (Morgan, 2006, p. 182). According to Morgan, unions are an excellent example of such counterorganizations.

The faculty association at our college is the union that negotiates the faculty collective agreement and is responsible for supporting collective grievances against administration. Morgan goes on to say that: "The strategy of exercising countervailing power thus provides a way of influencing organizations where one is not part of the established power structure" (p. 183). Members of our group elaborated on the characteristics of this group that seemed to help it maintain its power. They spoke of a culture within the counterorganization that seemed to intimidate a few research group members. This is consistent with the views expressed by Astin and Astin (2000) when they drew attention to the dysfunctionality of higher education organizations where faculty fail to disagree respectfully, favouring instead, "...to be critical or contrary, launch barbs, rankle colleagues, act out old grudges, or develop factions..." (p. 39). They suggest that this supports a climate of mistrust of leadership, leads to adversarial camps, and blocks transformational leadership. These are themes that are supported by the conversations described in this chapter.

Cooper et al. (2005) suggested the inherent structure of a bureaucratic organization when it is coupled with formalized labour-management relations can give rise to a counterorganization. In their analysis, they combined these structural components with the micropolitics of teacher supervision and evaluation which directly relates to the core of this study. They state:

> The micropolitics of teacher supervision and evaluation have become intertwined and directed by organized teachers confronting organized management, a relationship that routinizes political activity (e.g., grievances, lobbying, striking, and collective bargaining) and makes much of the collective action predictable. (p. 144)

While Cooper et al. refer to schools, the community college environment seems to share many characteristics with school systems and thus their comments are applicable to this analysis. During this action research project, there was a shift in the structure of the academic administration at the college that seemed to lessen the concern that members of our group had in the power and influence exerted by the counterorganization. With the re-introduction of Chairs reporting to Deans and being members of smaller administrative groupings that seemed to foster more authentic conversation and closer contact to the formal authority structure, members of our group began engaging other Chairs and their Deans in discussions that were directly related to our study. This connectedness to the formal authority structure would tend to lessen the power, and thus the impact and control, exerted by the counterorganization according to Morgan (2006).

Gender-based Issues

The conversations regarding the power associated with the counterorganization can also be discussed from the perspective of gender and gender-based power structures, organizational processes, and influence. This analysis must take on the much broader organizational context, however, since there is evidence throughout this study of gender-bias, gender-related power structures, and gender-related issues. It is important to reiterate that all the Chairs in the research group were women. I was the only male participant. It is also important to point out that I favour the view that gender-related power issues are not so much related to the positions of authority occupied by males or females but rather to the culture, discourse, and practices within an organization and their impact on women and men throughout that organization (Morgan, 2006; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004; Reay & Ball, 2000). Many times research group members expressed their sense of powerlessness in dealing with what they described as the prevailing climate of the faculty association. Their use of words like "Pollyanna", "didn't have the guts", "personal risk", "my comments are tiny and ...not as significant" are indicators of the strength of this disempowerment. They did not describe similar situations related to their positions of Chair within their own departments.

In describing the importance of credibility in the establishment of power and influence, the ability to be somewhat dispassionate (controlled passion) and analytical were stated as critical. Ross-Smith and Kornberger (2004) argue convincingly that rationality is a deeply gendered concept embedded in the managerial practices of virtually all western organizations. In their paper, they point out that even a recent discourse analysis of organizations related to strategy and strategic management exemplifies the masculine nature of contemporary management theory and practice. They contend that:

> [t]he principal focus in theories derived from structural/functionalism and its successor, systems theory, emphasise order and the compliance of organization members in acting according to pre-scripted roles. It is also replete with seemingly neutral, scientific vocabulary, purged of value, but, in fact, it is value laden. (p. 292)

Their view provides significant insight into the relative invisibility of this gender-based issue and a plausible explanation for the absence of its consideration in our research group. Our college had recently undergone a reorganization to include an office of strategic management which was assigned the tasks of strategic planning, developing metrics for measurement of progress, and managing policy structure. The organizational discourse for the past 15 years at the college was related to effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, competitive strategies, and individualism. The devotion of institutional resources to these activities at the expense of instructional expenditures demonstrates not only masculine forms of organizational discourse but also masculine organizational practices.

Reay and Ball (2000) pointed out that such feminine approaches to management as team building, collaboration, transformative leadership, empowerment, and distribution of resources have not had a significant impact on the scientific, analytical, and competitive nature of organizations—particularly educational organizations. Thus, there continues to be "…enormous difficulties in translating what are traditionally perceived to be 'women's ways of working' into senior management contexts…" (Reay & Ball, 2000, p. 151). The discomfort expressed by the Chairs in the research group related to a move toward a more developmental and nurturing environment for new faculty could be related to their paradoxical situation desiring to enact a more feminine form of leadership related to peer supervision within a prevailing masculine culture. The extent to which this is related to the pragmatic decision to 'mother' new faculty should be explored further but a connection could be made between the proposal for change in the tenure process and how it can be reconciled in a masculine environment. Reay and Ball (2000) put it this way:

> [women] are expected to lead and still remain an equal; to be tough and simultaneously kind and nurturant. Pragmatic adaptation inevitably follows. This brings us back to women drawing on a subject position as 'mother' in order to be seen as 'authentically, acceptably powerful'….(p. 152)

Mothering is traditionally seen to involve censor, discipline and control alongside listening and comforting and involves training and guiding from the person 'who knows best' (Reay & Ball, 2000). The mentorship relationship that our group suggested as a desirable replacement for the current tenure process seems to be well suited to an organizational practice based more on a feminine approach to management practice while still attending to the goals of the masculine environment. There is some evidence from the conversations reported in this chapter and in the next to suggest that the fundamentally gendered environment of our college posed a number of paradoxical and problematic situations related to women in the position of department Chair and in the role of evaluator/supervisor. Unfortunately, this study could not explore this topic in detail but the need for further research is clearly indicated.

The power and influence discussions related to counterorganization and to gender may be further related in that four of the five women in our research group had chosen not to attempt to become part of the faculty association 'in-group'. The fifth member of the group indicated that she had friends within the influential core of the faculty association but her link to that group had remained informal. Repeated comments were made to the effect that they preferred instead to disengage themselves from participation in that group. Without further study of the faculty association organizational discourse and its practices, it is not reasonable to speculate about the fundamental paradoxes and problematics related to women in that organization.

Building Confidence, Finding Power

Having explored two potential sources for the perception of disempowerment expressed by group members, it is important to note that the group became more confident over time regarding their ability to change the status quo regarding the induction of new faculty into the organization. The sources of this power were sufficient to provide a sense of self-efficacy in the group and in individuals within the group. The extent to which this increasing self-efficacy and the confidence to exert transformational leadership can be attributed to the process of action research is discussed in Chapter 6: Action Research and Institutional Change. A micropolitical analysis does indicate some potential sources for this power. Morgan (2006) uses the Robert Dahl definition of power: "...power involves an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done" (p. 166). Since the proposal from the research group was incorporated into institutional practice, our research group was able to demonstrate that it did have the power to influence a change in the practice of others. One source had to do with the ability to use the organizational structure, rules, and regulations to influence the result. The Chairs had significant experience in the college in using the formal structures and processes that are the hallmark of bureaucratic organizations and knew how to approach the Professional Standards Committee with appropriate information and timing that would coincide with institutional decision-making processes. Five members of the research group had been members, at one time or another, of that committee and I was a current member. As such, there was considerable knowledge in the group regarding the micropolitics within the committee and in its relationship to other college groups. Thus, two other sources of power as described by Morgan (2006), namely knowledge and information and an understanding of boundaries, were likely contributors to the strategy used by the research group in convincing the standards committee to move forward with a college-wide policy change.

The approach taken by our research group was to make sure that the proposed changes were incorporated into the much larger policy that was already under revision thus reducing the focus that any oppositional power groups would have on the one specific area of change that we were advocating. Group members also took advantage of other networks and alliances as the opportunity arose. This was evidenced by the use of other groups to introduce various aspects of our proposal and to 'test' the environment for acceptance as we proceeded. The power inherently associated with my position and the personal power that I possessed in relation to other senior administrators was seen by some group members as a benefit to the group. Morgan (2006) suggested that "the power one already has" is an important source of power. I have already suggested that the verbal cues provided in the conversations in our group would lead one to speculate that the Chairs in the group underestimated their credibility and, in fact, their influence in the organization. As the project unfolded, I believe that the members gained more confidence in their ability to influence change.

Power and the Tenure Process

As our research group characterized the problems related to the tenure process, a theme that kept recurring was the lack of confidence and anxiety on the part of probationary faculty as observed by members of our group. They recounted reports of risk aversion and lack of focus on reflective practice inherent in the current faculty evaluation process. They reported organizational discourse embedded in the regulations surrounding the evaluation process that gave rise to discrepancies between actual practice and mandated process. Morgan (2006) pointed out that in most organizations, the rules are created to ostensibly improve task performance but often do not match the activity actually carried out by employees in accomplishing their tasks. He suggested that rules are often used to protect their creators and are used by many for control purposes. The current policy on faculty evaluation made the assumption that the reports provided by peers and Chairs would be evaluative and critical of new faculty performance. Our research discovered that unless a Dean became skilful in interpreting the coded messages in those evaluative reports, it was unlikely that this source of information was useful in making a final determination for awarding tenure. The micropolitics of this situation are related to the organizational discourse surrounding a formal, bureaucratic college structure and its practice of faculty evaluation in combination with the control of information that was being provided to new faculty. This latter point relates to the suspected variability of historical accounts that new faculty were provided.

Conclusion

The climate of uncertainty, the lack of frank and open criticism of faculty performance, and the repetitive, regimented structure of the existing evaluation process seemed to be contributing factors to the risk aversion and anxiety associated with new faculty and their tenure process. This climate was not conducive to the developmental, collaborative, and self-reflective practice that the members of our group viewed as a goal for our proposed plan of action. As a result, the proposal for change included a new organizational discourse regarding the process, changes in the practices associated with evaluation, and changes in the structured relationship expectations between Chairs and new faculty. This is consistent with the views of Astin and Astin (2000) that called for higher education to move toward transformative leadership in which self knowledge, authenticity, empathy, commitment, and competence were proposed as the individual qualities required. They suggested that group qualities of transformative leadership include collaboration, shared purpose, division of labour, respectful disagreement, and a learning environment. These individual and group characteristics are congruent with the proposed mentorship year and the kind of leadership preferred by group members. The micropolitics related to the current system of faculty evaluation would seem to favour the more managerial and instrumental form of leadership which Astin and Astin (2000) refer to as management. It is in this essential tension that the research group developed its action plan and strategy for implementation.

The process of action research provided the structure within which this group of experienced Chairs could explore, reflect, and validate their own knowledge of the organization in which they worked. In addition, it provided the environment for a group construction of knowledge that enabled the group to plan and implement a strategy for change. The next chapter demonstrates how the authentic conversation experienced by the research group was able to further clarify the relationships that these individuals had with their organizational and personal role expectations.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF CHAIR—CONFLICTS AND AMBIGUITY

In order to further assess the practice of action research in an institutional setting where the participants are all insiders, it is important to analyze the process in relation to the content that was considered by the group. This demonstrates the application of action research as a method for sharing the knowledge that each participant brings to the table as well as a method for the creation of new knowledge that is contextual and specific to a particular setting. As our action research project proceeded, the role of the academic department Chair began to emerge as an area of interest and concern. Throughout our discussions regarding the planning context, problem definition, and proposal for action, issues arose that required the group to more fully explore their personal understandings of the organization: the work of the department Chair, institutional expectations, faculty expectations, and the Chair's efforts to satisfy these competing expectations.

This aspect of the study provides an insight into how the process of action research can help participants to explore their own perceptions more deeply, to share their understanding with others, and to formulate new approaches that take into account these differing view points. In contrast to the planning context discussion, the conversations regarding the role of the Chair explore the practice of the participants and the personal conflicts they experienced as they attempted to balance their own role expectations with those of their peers and the institution. In the first section, I describe the conversations that explored the meanings of peer review and peer supervision concentrating on the connotations associated with power differentials and Chair roles. I then describe the understandings shared regarding the categorization of Chair roles using the terms leadership and management. This conversation led to two areas of consideration which I describe in the next sections on leadership and supervision among peers, and leadership and mentorship. The research group also considered Chair workload and Chair credibility which are covered in the final two sections. In the closing discussion, I relate the conversations of our group to the literature in the area.

Management and Leadership

Many of our discussions took the form of comparing and contrasting the meanings associated with terms such as management, supervision, leadership, peer review, and peer supervision often trying to resolve what appeared to be conflicting values or competing concepts. While the dichotomies raised were not often diametrically opposed, they did suggest a continuum of understanding that made a difference to the participants in the way that we characterized the planning context, and in the way we proposed to change the practice of our institution. The ambiguities suggested here are not new to the study of department Chair roles but the specific directions taken by the group were related to the stresses expressed by the participants in this study related to their Chair role in evaluation, tenure processes, and leadership.

Peer Review or Peer Supervision

Since the department Chair is a faculty member and, in a formal sense, considered a peer to all other faculty members, the activity of reviewing or supervising peers was an area of interest to the group. The connotations associated with the terms "peer review" and "peer supervision" centered on the concepts of review and supervision. The meaning of "peer" was discussed later. It seemed that members of our group did not have any difficulty in recognizing that some form of peer input into evaluation was necessary to maintain a high standard of program and service delivery to students. Our exploration of 'review' and 'supervision' was explored through conversations that considered power, hierarchy, and accountability; peer relationships; and management and leadership.

Power, hierarchy, and accountability. The differences between the concepts of 'review' and 'supervision' were fundamental in the minds of some group members. For example:

> Mona: They mean [different things] absolutely. Supervision means to me that I have some responsibility to be checking up on you. That I have some power over you.
>
> Carol: and I have some accountability to you if I—
>
> Shannon: Peer review seems like I have some ability to give you input and to help you with development but it doesn't feel like I have power over [you]. [Supervision] has to do with a power relationship, I guess, for me.
>
> Carol: The word supervision does that for me. The word supervision means you have more authority than I do. You're accountable for what I'm doing.
>
> Siobhan: You don't tell them what they can and can't do. Like I would supervise a school dance. Not review it.
>
> Gerry: So the supervision thing is related to power—hierarchical. (Group Meeting 2: 420-438)

A consensus developed in the group relating the concepts of power, hierarchy, and accountability with the term 'supervision'. Review, on the other hand, seemed to support the concepts of coaching, mentoring, and professional development. This difference in connotation also seemed to help the participants to segment their roles as department Chairs and to begin assessing the components separately. When we discussed the role expectations of Chairs at our college relative to supervision, there appeared to be differences in understanding across the organization. For example:

> Shannon: I think Chairs might be in the role [of supervisor] but I think there's lots of us who don't wish to be.
>
> Siobhan: And some of us who don't take that role and contractually we're in trouble if we do take it. But that varies from department to department.
>
> Mona: Some of the expectations are covert rather than overt. So if there's a problem, you have to, right. But it's covert. Like and it's difficult to talk about...
>
> Mona: ...if you have any kind of associational level with your colleagues then you are peers and criticism of a colleague in that case is soft ground. You need to proceed very cautiously or you get a slander suit.... (Group Meeting 2: 450-470)

The covert nature of supervision was later described to include the informal feedback a Chair might give to a Dean to let them know that there was a serious problem with a colleague and that the situation should be investigated. A further example of covert supervision by the Chair involved the informal 'summative assessment' of part time faculty, in that Chairs make the decision to rehire a part time faculty member without access to the formal evaluation processes associated with the Dean. The term supervision provided significant role ambiguity. There was a feeling that there was some institutional expectation of supervision but that this seemed poorly articulated. There were questions raised about the legality of assuming the role as depicted in Siobhan's comment related to the contractual obligations of faculty or in Mona's comment regarding "soft ground" and the potential for legal liability. Her reference to "associational" indicated the interesting split between the official position of faculty in their association and other roles of faculty outside that association. Intertwined with these concerns was Shannon's comment regarding her distaste for the supervisory role.

Peer relationships. The challenges related to the ambiguity of the Chair's supervisory role included the quality of peer relationships in the department. This was exemplified by Shannon's comment related to the potential of moving back into a regular faculty position:

> Shannon: But then it would seem to me that it might become quite awkward to return to a teaching position after a two-year or three-year assignment as Chair. And I think that is one of the things about being part of the same collective agreement. Yeah I know about some people in my department who had some struggles during their first couple of terms and I worked with them to help them and so now when I go back to teach with them it may be a bit uncomfortable but at least my job was to be their coach not to make the final decision about whether or not they got the job which I think is where you get into difficulty when you return. So we might have to think about our organizational structure in how the Chair is connected to that—it might be a permanent position that you are hired to be the Chair of—which they do in [some] other colleges. (Group Meeting 2: 578-586)

Shannon expressed that she had mitigated her discomfort in returning to a faculty position following a term as the department Chair by remaining separated from the summative assessment of her peers by assuming the role of coach. She also introduced the idea that to actually make judgements related to supervisory duties, she would have to more permanently leave the ranks of faculty. In contrast, Meghan and Carol provided a different point of view:

> Meghan: And I don't feel like there's a conflict doing that. I don't feel like I'm having trouble doing that....
>
> Carol: ...No, I would never—I've done that in the other department I worked in, but I certainly wouldn't want the Chair [to be] anything but a faculty member because I think that it's program concerns I'd have. If the program then is run one way because that person never rotates out—there's some real danger for the program itself if you have a forever Chair. Or a Chair that has decision making power. 'Cause where we are now we don't—we work as a team because it's our program but there could be some dangers with that. (Group Meeting 2: 601-612)

Meghan and Carol viewed the supervisory role as a more natural role for the chair that did not pose serious conflict. Carol was expressing the view that there was an important role for Chairs in maintaining program continuity and quality and that this did relate to peer supervision and review. This difference of opinion was partly resolved in later conversations when it was agreed that the role of supervision should be restricted to personnel issues and that other Chair duties should be collaborative in nature—particularly those related to program, curriculum, and student decisions. This highlighted the ambiguity related to the ways in which Chairs related to their peers—supervisory in one activity, collaborative in others. The implication is that no practice of supervision could be considered collaborative which suggests a very traditional scientific management view of supervision.

Management and supervision. The following statement by Shannon was an attempt to further dichotomize the concepts of review and supervision for better understanding. "If you say peer supervision, that's management. If you say peer review, that's leadership" (Group Meeting 2: 903). While three group members did not object to the use of either term and did not require that a distinction be made, they were willing to concede that the difference was important enough to the others that we should use the terms more precisely. These different points of view persisted:

> Carol: I think peer review is like you come and see what I'm doing—something's not working for me. It's more of an equal. Now I will do likewise for you. It's just discussing about whether it's the way we teach or what we teach or how we present something. If we say peer supervision, it's when you come to assess my abilities and tell somebody about them.
>
> Meghan: I use them more interchangeably… (Group Meeting 2: 927-932)

As the project became more focused, there was an agreement that the meanings related to peer review and peer supervision could be applied in group discussions and that we would have to pay attention to the context of their usage.

The relationship between supervisor and peer in the Chair role continued to pose issues for our group throughout our project. Carol described her position:

> Carol: But that person is a peer. And I am not in management. You know, that is the conflict, I think. I don't think that we don't want to deal with it, but it's a really difficult position to be in because that person may be my Chair in a couple years. God forbid. But it's a complicated process because it's not a lifetime commitment as a Chair. At some point I go back to being a peer and so I don't know how to get around that and want to do the best for my program. You always have to juggle that. But I really don't want the students suffering. I really do want things to be better. (Group Meeting 3: 196-201)

Carol's words, "…go back to being a peer" provide further evidence of her acceptance of the clear distinction between peer and Chair and the implied hierarchical relationship. Again, the lack of permanency in the Chair position was seen as a causative factor in the ambiguity expressed by the Chairs in the group. Carol highlighted her concern that maintaining program standards would ultimately lead to conflict with peers and the potential erosion of peer relationships. The exercise of supervisory responsibility could be damaging to long term workplace harmony.

A formal Chair role in assessment of faculty performance could lead to requirements for disciplinary action or required development activity. The long term effect on the department and the personal working relationships with colleagues became a major concern for some group members. In the case of part time faculty, however, it seemed that the Chairs were very willing to make an informal assessment by choosing to rehire or not rehire a particular part time faculty member. Shannon stated it this way:

> Shannon: It wasn't an issue for me with part time because there isn't that long time relationship that often—at least with ours. If they don't do a good job with us the first time, we don't hire them a second time because we have others we can hire instead...Isn't this mean, but I find it easy to impact the life of a part time faculty member. (Group Meeting 3: 410-425)

The decision to rehire or not is the most significant consequence of a summative assessment but, in the case of our existing policy on evaluation of faculty, the department Chair was only required to provide input into the formal evaluation process. The Chair's hiring responsibility for part time faculty was carried out without access to the formal evaluation process since the Dean was the officially designated evaluator of performance with input from Chairs, peers, and students. This is related to the covert activities of Chairs relative to authority and responsibility for hiring and termination that was mentioned earlier. The paradox of this situation began to be realized as we proceeded with our discussion.

Conclusion. The ambiguity expressed by the Chairs in consideration of peer supervision and peer review was related to their insistence in maintaining their peer relationships with the other faculty in their departments, their desire to maintain program quality standards, their concern for their working relationships following their Chair appointments, and their actual practice of making judgements regarding one group of their peers. The paradoxical situation of making the hiring judgement for part time staff and yet not formally evaluating their performance led some group members to rethink their personal relationship to their role as department Chair. Peer supervision came to be understood by the group as a practice related to continuation of employment and exertion of power over others. While not a comfortable role for most participants, they did realize that they had often assumed such a role in an informal or "covert" way.

Leader or Manager

Group members were able to clarify how each of them could position themselves relative to the chair role by exploring their understandings of 'leader' and 'manager'. Group members began to separate the various department Chair roles into two categories. Managerial roles were viewed as being related to the institutional bureaucratic requirements such as budget planning and monitoring, involvement in hiring faculty, and carrying out duties that were specified by organizational policy including the faculty evaluation policy. Leadership roles were seen to encompass building and maintaining peer relationships within the department, mentorship of new faculty, departmental planning and goal setting, and conflict resolution. The participants viewed management roles as mundane, bureaucratic requirements that were less interesting than leadership roles. I include this analysis in order to demonstrate how the action research process helped the participants to clarify their understanding of their Chair roles and how they planned to change a 'managerial role' into a 'leadership role'.

Leader among peers. Shannon introduced the idea that, while the group members were technically all members of faculty, they did see themselves as apart from faculty by virtue of their positions as department Chairs. She stated: "Because…I think about the college now in comparison to how I thought about it six years ago when I was a faculty." She said this without attention to the meaning behind her statement and the group did not take up this discussion until later in the project. She distinguished herself from other faculty by virtue of her position. The discussion of leadership and management seemed to be more related to the enactment of these concepts and the personal preferences of the individual Chairs in the group rather than to the appropriateness of the roles.

Initially, there was an effort made to link the differences in the definitions of leader and manager to the differences between peer review and peer supervision. Later, the connection was abandoned. The following is an example of the early conversation:

> Mona: …what's the relationship of leadership to supervision and peer reviews? It's the difference between being a manager and being a leader.
>
> Shannon: Yes, exactly, I was thinking the same thing.
>
> Mona: And overtly we're managers and covertly we're expected to be leaders.
>
> Shannon: And actually I think of myself as a leader and not as a manager. So overtly I am a leader and covertly I'm a manager.
>
> Mona: It's good to talk about it because you get caught between these roles in terms of who you really are and what you are supposed to be doing.
>
> Meghan: For me, I…look at the Chairs more like a school principal and so I do feel I have a bit of a supervisory role if you look at supervision as helping

> somebody or giving them feedback or helping them to grow, helping them to develop. I feel that is part of my role. (Group Meeting 2: 471-487)

There was continued discussion about what the role of the principal in schools really was, and the same differences in perception arose. Some saw the role of principal as supervisor and manager, some saw it as peer and mentor, while all saw an expectation of leadership. This exemplified the role confusion that Chairs have in our college. There was a contradiction in the identification of various Chair roles as covert or overt indicating very unclear sets of expectations by at least two group members. In both cases, however, there is reference to an unofficial role of either evaluation/supervision or coaching/mentoring. Covert implies that the Chair feels that such unofficial work should be kept out of the 'public eye'—that it has to be done but because it does not match the perceived expectations of the Chair, peers, or administration or a combination of the three, the activity must be kept behind the scenes. For one participant leadership including maintaining positive peer relationships, planning, and goal setting was considered a covert activity and in the other, management including summative assessment of peers, budget planning and monitoring, and meeting policy requirements was considered a covert activity.

Preferred Chair roles. The distinctions between leader and manager roles continued to provide the backdrop for the participants to explore their own relationships to their roles as Chairs. Shannon's comments provide an example:

> Shannon: I want to go back to this idea of leadership and management, because I think when I took the job as Chair, one of the reasons I took the job, or I was interested in the job was because I thought it was an opportunity to be a leader. That I wouldn't have to worry or get caught up in the management stuff. Because that's what really appealed to me. I don't like the management stuff...Because leadership means something very different to me than management.
>
> Gerry:...What are the things that you would do to exert that leadership?
>
> Shannon: I'd role model, I'd communicate, I'd coach— (Group Meeting 2: 777-796)

Shannon had declared her personal preference for roles that she defined as leadership such as modelling, communication, and coaching. Her comments suggest that the more intensely interpersonal interactions suited her better than routine and impersonal activities. In pursuing this line of reasoning, the concept of coaching was explored. I suggested that the sport analogy of coaching revealed a concept not of waiting for people to ask for advice, but rather of constantly observing and offering suggestions for corrective action. Coaching is not an act among peers in this analogy. This conversation ensued:

> Shannon: And I think you coach based on what you see as well as what they ask for.
>
> Gerry: Based on performance, though?
>
> Shannon: And I don't have any trouble looking at performance and giving people feedback. But that's not what supervision means to me. Supervision means to me that there's a power relationship. So if I'm the leader in the department and I have a responsibility to be assistive to them in their development, then I have ways of doing that. And one of them is observing and making comment about their performance. (Group Meeting 2: 777-819)

Shannon was very willing to take responsibility for observing behaviour, offering assistance to correct difficulties, and maintaining a set of standards—either explicit or implicit. In this respect, the only difference then, between leader and manager would be the formal role assignment of supervisor—manager in Shannon's view—and the assignment of final decision-making to the Chair.

Balancing Chair roles. The idea that leadership, supervision, and management were all connected within the role of Chair emerged when Meghan said:

> Meghan: To me leadership's an umbrella term. It's a big picture term and under it there's supervision and management....And that's been clear to me as I've been working in these two roles—with [Department R and Department S]. I feel like a leader—a big picture leader in [Department R]. But my leadership role in [Department S] is very much focused on management. Because [the faculty coordinator] is doing all of that program supervision. So it's really a different feeling and I haven't got my head around how that works. But I know the things that I'm doing in [Department S] are more management kinds of things. I don't like those as well. I'm like you Shannon, they're not as much fun to me. Being sure all the forms are in, being sure all that stuff is done. I can do that because I have to do that but I don't like it. It's not as much fun for me as taking on that whole role of working with people.
>
> Shannon: Is it possible to be a leader without having to manage?
>
> Meghan: I don't think so.
>
> Mona: You can do a little bit with the [support staff]. We delegate [management activities].
>
> Shannon: But if we think about leadership the way it's being talked about in our institution, that's not necessarily—because everyone's a leader it just depends where you're a leader. Is that right? You can be a manager and not a leader and leader without being a manager. (Group Meeting 2: 837-855)

Meghan, like Shannon, was more interested in Chair responsibilities that were managed through interpersonal contact requiring establishment and maintenance of strong peer relationships. Following this exchange, there was discussion about the potential for delegating routine managerial work but it was pointed out that any official appointment to a leadership position at the college meant that one was accountable for those management tasks even if they were delegated. The question persisted, however, regarding the potential for leadership without managerial responsibility. This was seen as possible in informal leadership situations where followership developed in a group and permission was given freely by the group to lead. This is not normally the situation in which Chairs find themselves. A consensus began to emerge that helped to clarify the expectation that both management and leadership tasks were important to the role of Chair. The official appointment as a department Chair provided the authority and responsibility for many management duties but was accompanied with the expectation—now more generally understood by the members of our group—of leadership, at least at the department level.

The discussion about the distinction between management and leadership gave rise to clarification of participants' views of their day-to-day work as chairs. This reflection on their current work helped to provide insight into their personal preferences related to the multiple role expectations of chairs. Shannon's observation began such a conversation:

> Shannon: I'm already [the Chair of a multi-program department]. Because I have all those programs but I would say that I'm not a manager. There are some tasks that have to be done but I think I'm still a leader for the ...programs in my area.
>
> Gerry: But I think you are acting as a manager.
>
> Shannon: In what way?
>
> Gerry: That work is getting done. Workloads are being assigned, your budget is being monitored
>
> Others: Hiring is being done. You are doing it...
>
> Meghan: I'm finding that even as I give over jobs to [the faculty coordinator], and say, "Can you do this?", Can you do this?"—well really, that's managing. [Others: you're delegating] But you still feel like you're accountable for what happens...

> Shannon: I guess that's not how I think of management. But I see what you are saying. Okay. (Group Meeting 2: 880-897)

In the formal positions held by the participants, the concepts of management and leadership as defined by the group coexisted. Shannon's aversion to the more routine 'management' tasks was profound enough to warrant the denial of the 'manager' label. Our exploration seemed to bring recognition that formal leadership positions were tied to managerial functions and that the label of manager could at least be understood if not totally accepted.

An important sub-text for me in this conversation was the implication that management could occur without leadership or that leadership could occur without management. Meghan had stated that she didn't think they could exist separately. Official appointments to management positions almost invariably carry significant expectations of relationship building, consensus building, goal setting, and coaching or mentoring which our group seemed to consider more related to leadership than to management. Meghan expressed a similar view when she suggested that leadership was an umbrella term that encompassed both management and supervision. The group, however, persisted in maintaining the separation. One possible explanation for maintaining the dichotomy is that the group used it to categorize the various tasks into two groups, one that included externally mandated, routine administrative tasks required by the position of Chair, and one that was more internally motivated and more related to development and improvement. This is similar to the three role models described by Tucker (1992) where he categorized the "caretaker" role model as the one that looked after routine administrative tasks while the "broker" and "developer" role models were more concerned with development.

Conclusion. Throughout the discussion regarding leadership and management, there was little disagreement that the terms had different meanings but there was less agreement on what those meanings were. The participants' connection of leadership to development, coaching and mentoring became clear. In addition, the group recognized that regardless of whether leadership was overtly expected, covertly practiced, or widely accepted; their understanding of leadership was considered to be a legitimate Chair role. This realization had a profound influence on the action that was ultimately taken in that the proposal for policy change explicitly mandated the role of mentorship as an expression of leadership for the Chair in the new tenure process.

Leader or Supervisor Among Peers

The participants focused some attention on their peer relationships with the faculty members in their departments by exploring the meaning of "peer" and the importance of maintaining strong relationships with peers. The group explored how their roles were shaped by the expectations of new faculty for supervision, delegated supervisory duties, perceived power differentials, power and leadership, institutional expectations, personal preferences in the role of Chair, and the specific role of Chairs in faculty evaluation. Through this discussion participants gained further insight into how they related to the Chair role and the expectations that they perceived had an influence on that role.

New faculty expectations for supervision. As new faculty enter the college, they bring with them expectations for the role of Chair. Group members perceived these expectations to involve both a power differential and a supervisory relationship. This highlighted an additional source of conflict in the role of the Chair. Shannon stated:

> Shannon:...One of our faculty said one day, "You know," she said, "I was hired by [Mavis], [Mavis] was always my boss. When [Mavis] retired and [Sandra] became the Chair, it was just [Sandra]. Now it's just Shannon. [Mavis] will always be my boss." The other night I was having a conversation with a new faculty member and she said that, "You have to understand, Shannon, that when you say something we take it to heart because you are the Chair." But I'm a peer—no, in her mind, I am somehow different than peer, she's not quite sure how I'm different but what I say has a lot more authority for her. So it depends on what you were doing when they came in....
>
> Siobhan: But our guys see it differently, too. Coming in they think that you are going to be like a principal...
>
> Carol: A letter tells them. Their contract letter says that they will receive day-to-day direction from the Chair so that is a clear message to new faculty, I think, that I have some kind of supervisory role—just in that sentence. (Group Meeting 2: 527-541)

This exchange provided an opportunity for the participants to consider the expectations that new faculty had for their Chairs. The three different views expressed indicated that initial contact with the college and the expectations that new faculty brought with them had the potential to persist over time. The Chair in place when the faculty member arrived, the institutional discourse in the formal letter of offer, and the traditional expectations of school principals were seen by the participants as important in the establishment of the relationship between faculty and Chair. These initial impressions were viewed as being beyond the control of the Chairs providing some explanation for their comments suggesting that they had worked hard at establishing a more equal relationship with their peers.

Delegated supervision. The conflict within the Chair role was further explored as the participants discussed personal and institutional expectations related to their day-to-day work. Chairs in our institution, for example, have been delegated the authority to hire part time instructors. Almost all Chairs have accepted this responsibility and regularly issue contracts to part time instructors. Informally, they make judgements regarding the performance of part time instructors by deciding to rehire or not rehire the same person for subsequent contracts. I viewed this as a discrepancy between formal authority and actual practice:

> Gerry: ...I think there's a bit of a disconnect there between supervision, hiring responsibility, and evaluation responsibility. I think that if you are the one that does the hiring, and that it's perfectly legitimate to do it there because it's close to the action, you know the most about what is going on there and you also know the most about the kind of students you've got and what kind of activities are taking place in the department and so on. There's a whole bunch of knowledge there that actually I think the Chair can provide in that evaluation/peer review/peer supervision.... (Group Meeting 2: 569-576)

The ability to make final decisions, whether assumed or actually delegated, regarding personnel issues was a factor that was indicated to contribute to the perception of Chair as supervisor and manager. Shannon stated:

> Shannon: But it goes back to something that Mona said earlier for me when I think about leadership, I think about mentoring and support and when I think about management I think about the word supervise and recommend...and it's just about making tough decisions. Things like performance and money. (Group Meeting 2: 665-671)

Shannon's comments here reinforced the connection between the terms "supervision" and "management." It also signalled the connection between evaluation and management which was further discussed:

> Meghan: But I think there is a bit of an evaluation component. Because you write a report on everybody at the end of the year. And there is evaluation in that report. There's recommendations and there's—
>
> Shannon: Of people who are sessional or probationary [others: yes]. But they get the same thing from their other peers. The only difference is that the Chair is expected to comment on the whole thing.
>
> Meghan: And so there still is a bit of a role there. Because that is being read by the Dean who ultimately makes that decision. Because you know that if you write some recommendations in that report that are fairly negative, you're going to be asked by your Dean why you wrote those. (Group Meeting 2: 712-721)

Meghan and Shannon, through this discussion, indicate that the 'official' role in evaluation of faculty at the college included reporting of observations and recommendation and should include an evaluative component. The difficulty experienced by many Chairs is not in criticizing excellent performance but in pointing out poor performance. Meghan's comment suggests that negative evaluative comments are avoided in an effort to avoid conflict. This exchange provided a link between the current practices of Chairs and the formal process of evaluation even though some group members still rejected the administrative role of assessing the performance of their peers. Meghan and Carol, in particular, were very accepting of this supervisory role but Shannon and Siobhan were not. This linkage is one characteristic that sets Chairs apart from other faculty and appeared to be a source of discomfort.

Perceived power differentials. Mona questioned the group regarding the perception of peers when it came to receiving corrective feedback from Chairs:

> Mona:...do you perceive it as not hierarchical? But they [faculty] must perceive it as hierarchical.
>
> Shannon: Exactly, because remember I said that they see me differently.
>
> Mona: Certainly in defining a role of leadership....Similarly, is your role the same to new faculty as it might be for older—say in the situation for older faculty, are you involved in coaching with them? (Group Meeting 2: 824-827)

She later added:

> Mona: The other thing is that if someone feels—even if it's set up as a peer thing—if they feel there is a hierarchical relationship, regardless of the words that you use, for them it's supervision. It's just because of where they're coming from. And they see it as that. So the words don't disguise that for them.
>
> Gerry: So I think, Siobhan, whether you like it or not, the two new guys in your department are saying, "Siobhan better like me, otherwise I'm not going to last here."
>
> Siobhan: I know. And that's a reality....and I work hard to diffuse it.
>
> Shannon: Yeah, me too. (Group Meeting 2: 939-954)

Both Siobhan and Shannon, through this exchange, indicated their discomfort at being seen as the 'first among equals'. Again, the recognition of where they were situated in the social structure of their own departments was being elaborated and better understood. The resulting proposal for change included the group's views of both leadership and management/supervision Chair roles. Again, Siobhan and Shannon suggested that the power differential that automatically develops between Chair and faculty is not conducive to the kind of relationship that they wished to establish with their peers.

The characterization of the peer relationships between the Chair and other members of the faculty in a department was further explored by Mona:

> Mona: I think it can't be truly peer unless it's completely reciprocal. Unless it has full reciprocity. So that they would have as much involvement in your work—to come in your classroom, talk about your teaching—and they would feel empowered to do that as much as you going into theirs. That would be reciprocity. (Group Meeting 2: 985-988)

The implication was that reciprocity between chair and faculty almost never exists, especially not with new faculty. The importance of new faculty members' perceptions was important in understanding the chair's role was raised throughout the project. While some of our group indicated they worked hard to achieve a reciprocal peer relationship with new faculty, this was not achieved until the probationary period ended and tenure was awarded, if it was ever truly achieved. The potential for a more lasting hierarchical relationship was indicated in Shannon's comments regarding the continued deference paid to an individual who was the Chair at the time that a new faculty member had arrived. Further to this:

> Shannon:...you talked about reciprocity—if there is a peer then there is reciprocity. That's what I heard you say. But that's not really true because in continuous appointment there is no reciprocity between continuous appointment, probationary, and sessional. There is still a difference—so are we saying then that continuous appointment people have a different relationship with probationary [faculty] than a Chair has? We're all going in and giving feedback but the probationary person doesn't have any opportunity. ...
>
> Gerry: An interesting idea about unequal peers...The perception of the folks that are new clearly don't see you, an experienced person—and particularly the Chair who's an experienced person—as a peer. They clearly see you in a role of either supervision or maybe mentor, maybe coach.... So I think that it isn't a peer relationship, actually. (Group Meeting 3: 212-241)

Participants implied that there always existed a power differential between the department Chair and other faculty in the department. Chairs' efforts to minimize or remove that power differential began to have little effect as evidenced by Siobhan's comments. Group members seemed to question their motivations in trying to minimize the differential. The meaning of "peer relationship" was being explored and its potential for existence was being challenged. The motivation to achieve more equitable relationships was ambiguous, however. Only two group members, Siobhan and

Shannon, actively made efforts to avoid being seen as "the boss." Was this an effort to avoid being associated with administration? Shannon and Carol described their concern about "going back to faculty" as being one difficulty in communicating criticism of other faculty openly and frankly. Unlike Siobhan, however, Carol did not express the same concern regarding power differentials in that she readily accepted the multiple roles of manager, supervisor, and leader. The motivations behind the need to form and maintain "true peer relationships" bears further inquiry.

Group members suggested that the perception of Chair as a manager/supervisor extends to the students as well. Two group members described stories of how students had come to them to resolve issues they had with instructors in the program. Both said that they did have a responsibility to try to resolve these issues and were mostly successful in doing so. If Chairs were true peers in the reciprocal way that Mona suggested, it would be difficult to act in the position of mediator of disputes without extensive time commitment to relationship building. The examples related by two participants indicated that the Chair has an advantage in resolving issues quickly because of the perceptions and expectations of other faculty members and of students relative to the position of Chair.

Power and leadership. The linkage between the unequal nature of the relationship between new faculty and department Chairs was an opportunity for providing leadership. My comments opened one such conversation:

> Gerry: ...Well, if you don't have an equal relationship, why don't you use that unequal relationship in order to further the aims of your department or guide the development of the staff, and actually get to some agreed upon goals. I mean, not necessarily your goals, but agreed upon kind of goals in the group and you can use the differential to guide and exert leadership—not just management or supervision. (Group Meeting 3: 240-244)
>
> Siobhan: But that's hard to do if it's not your want to use that.
>
> Gerry:...Why?...
>
> Siobhan: To get your own way?...Your perception of power...I would fight to dispel the nature of me as boss.
>
> Shannon: Me too.
>
> Carol: Would you be okay with captain? There has to be a leader. Doesn't have to be a boss.
>
> Siobhan: But it's not imposing your own will.

> Meghan: But that's your leadership style….
>
> Carol: …There is a perception, he sees you as the boss.
>
> Siobhan: I know, I know. (Group Meeting 3: 240-282)

Again and again, Siobhan and Shannon resisted being seen as "boss", Shannon indicated that her negative experience practicing a hierarchical, top-down management style in a previous job had contributed to her distaste in being "the boss." She described how alone and unsupported she felt when placed in that 'boss' position—a situation that ultimately caused her to leave that position in favour of the college position. All the group members emphasized their preference for positive working relationships involving collaboration, sharing, and development that seemed not to fit with the traditional connotation of "boss." The experiences of Meghan and Carol and the training they received seemed to have provided them with more comfort in balancing these issues and they attempted to share their understanding with the others.

Participants raised issues and personal feelings about the Chair/faculty relationship frequently during the project. Shannon exemplified this:

> Shannon:…there's not a consensus about whether or not we want to take on this role. Because I remember you, Meghan, saying—and I was thinking about the experience that you come from and the experience that I come from and whether there was anything in that. I've been trying to figure out why it is that I'm resisting it. What is it that is making me resist it? And I feel like I am resisting it. I feel like I really am resisting the idea of becoming a supervisor. That has some meaning for me that I don't want to have anything to do with. And I'm not sure what that's about. I think it might be partly from the culture that I come from—I think that I said this the last time—that [my former job] was very hierarchical and very top down and very icky. And when I hear the word supervisor, I hear somebody standing over top of me. Kind of imposing—that's what I react to. And I don't like that. (Group Meeting 3: 284-293)

Shannon's resistance to the role of supervisor was expressed after five years in the position of Chair of her department. From comments she made throughout the project it was clear that Shannon had carried out supervisory activities such as hiring new faculty, writing recommendations for tenure appointments, and choosing not to rehire part time staff that have not done well. Her resistance seemed more related to her emotional response to the term 'supervision' and with her stated connection of that word to the term 'management'. Her reaction to her previous employment situation figured prominently in this perception. Two other group members described a different experience of supervision. Meghan is quoted elsewhere in this paper as suggesting that she enjoyed a role that was more a coach and mentor but that her guidance definitely set the direction for her work group. She referred to this as being more like a "captain." This is an interesting distinction to make. While I did not challenge this perspective at the time, I am surprised that it was possible to see the role of captain as any less directive than the word boss—except perhaps that "captain" has a more romantic connotation. At their extremes, one refers to adventure on the high seas and the other sounds more like a slave driver on a plantation. The terms manager and supervisor, for me, carry less negative connotation than the words captain, boss, or coach—all of which have a directive element associated with them.

Institutional expectations. While the perception of a power differential between faculty and Chair was often raised as an issue, there was more acceptance of this situation as the project proceeded. In an effort to characterize the college power structure, Carol pointed out that we were clearly part of a hierarchical organization. This discussion followed:

> Siobhan: But are the Chairs?
>
> Carol: Oh, I think so. I think we are, even though we don't like to be.
>
> Mona: I think for sure.
>
> Meghan: Even in our dissemination of information [we are] very much hierarchical.
>
> Carol: And when we talk to a student, what are the steps that the student [is supposed to take]. First they go to the instructor, then they go to the Chair, then they go to the Dean.
>
> Meghan: We tell them that…
>
> Carol: Perception-wise we do have a hierarchy. (Group Meeting 3: 306-323)

These comments indicated that the organizational discourse of the college tends to establish and reinforce a hierarchical structure. The perception of the Chair role by both students and other faculty also established a power differential that persisted in the organization. The strengthening of the group's understanding of this power differential was demonstrated as the research group discussed the proposed new practice where the observed faculty member would do the writing following a Chair or peer observation of a teaching/learning interaction. If the written report did not match the Chair's understanding of the conversation regarding the observation, the Chair would be required to write comments as an addendum to the report. While discussing the process, the following conversation took place:

> Mona:...we're still going to have that very subtle, in charge, kind of power kind of relationship.
>
> Carol: I don't think it's that subtle.
>
> Mona: If we don't agree on the findings. I'm going to write a note instead. I think we can't run away from that.
>
> Shannon: No, I don't think we can either—I don't think I would like to. It feels more comfortable this way. It really does. It almost feels—it's the same with a student—it feels more developmental. Keeping them informed but at some point you have to give them a grade and they understand. And this feels more like that. (Group Meeting 4: 398-409)

Increasing acceptance of the supervisory role and the power differential was apparent at this point. Shannon, in her last comment, referred to the combination of supervision and mentorship that had emerged in the new format being proposed in our project. The theme of rationalizing this role by comparing it to the role that faculty have with students seemed to help with the understanding of how peer supervision, mentorship, and evaluation might all be linked and that the Chair can provide that linkage.

Personal preferences. Shannon indicated that the role of supervisor was more difficult and posed a more challenging workload when the group explored other concerns that they had regarding the supervision role. She also did not like making judgements about other people's performance. Further exploration indicated that in her former job, she was solely responsible for performance appraisal. She summed it up with:

> Shannon: My own feelings, probably, about what I was doing. I was really uncomfortable with it and so in my view I wasn't good at it because I wasn't comfortable. And the job was all about supervision so I just left the job. And when I got this one, the Chair role—I really liked this because it has all the good stuff and none of that piece that I don't like. And so, I'm avoiding that and I don't know what I need to have happen to get me past that. (Group Meeting 3: 341-345)

As the group tried to help Shannon work through these issues, some elements of the college situation and others' experiences were contrasted to those experienced by Shannon in her previous job. For example, Meghan indicated that she had been involved in some training that helped her to work as a supervisor incorporating leadership and mentorship roles. She indicated that a series of seminars helped her to develop a reflective practice of supervision that focused on the empowerment of others.

"I felt like I was more of a coach although I had that evaluative role as well" (Group Meeting 3: 352-353). Mona suggested that the isolation that Shannon had experienced in her previous job might have contributed to her dissatisfaction with the role. Mona described her experience:

> Mona: Having gone through a couple of years ago in a fairly rough situation one of the things that was sort of a saving here was having other Chairs. So you weren't quite as stranded in tough decision-making or following through on a process in a tough way. It was relatively easy to pull someone in. So there wasn't that same sense of you're a solitary Chair in a solitary department dealing with a really rough situation. And that makes it a lot easier to get someone else's bird's eye view. Someone else you can talk it through. Someone else who you can talk through your own coaching in this situation. Can be another set of eyes. (Group Meeting 3: 368-374)

In contrast to other supervisory situations the college environment was seen as providing an opportunity to establish collaborative and supportive networks that could help build confidence and knowledge in the distasteful or difficult aspects of management that our group described. Mona suggested that there were others at the college willing to help and that she was comfortable in asking for help.

Chair role in evaluation of new faculty. The Chair role in faculty evaluation continued to be a source of debate as we drafted the final proposal document. Consider the following conversation:

> Shannon: ...what would be the purpose of that statement [in our proposal] that would be different than the bullet at the top—the Chair taking an evaluative role in writing the evaluative report...could we say something that the report may include recommendations for continuation of the probation or something like that?
>
> Siobhan: We don't make those.
>
> Gerry: But you recommend it to the Dean.
>
> Shannon: But we do at the end of the term, we do. We recommend for continuous appointment.
>
> Meghan: Yeah, we do.
>
> Gerry: Not all Chairs do that.
>
> Shannon: When I became a Chair, it was an expectation.
>
> Gerry: I know because some of [the Deans] said that.
>
> Meghan: I always did that.

> Gerry: When Chairs asked me [as a Dean], I said, "I would like your recommendation."
>
> Shannon: And so you say something like I'm pleased to support the continuous appointment [others: yeah, that's right] so could you not make the same kind of thing at the end of this?
>
> Meghan: You probably do that too, don't you?
>
> Gerry: But just to recommend to the Dean. ...
>
> Siobhan: Yeah. But I think that has to be—
>
> Gerry: So we'll spell that out.
>
> All: Yeah.
>
> Shannon: And particularly the part where we look at the [evaluation] package. Because I think that's where it gets a bit dicey. So if we make a comment in our own report about what we have seen and based on what we've seen, we're okay with this person continuing probation. (Group Meeting 6: 756-792)

While the basic concept of providing evaluative statements was acceptable to group members, the issue that the Chair might have a role to play in the granting of tenure was a debatable point. The wording that we agreed to in the proposal for the Chair role after the second year of probation was: "The Chair is asked to review the package and provide a statement of evaluation. A recommendation for continuation is included." (From the proposal submitted to the Professional Standards Committee, Appendix A). Another statement was included in the proposal for the end of the third year of probation: "The Chair provides a recommendation for continuous appointment as does the Dean." The discomfort that had been expressed by some participants relative to the concept of peer supervision had been somewhat mitigated by the assurance that there would be ample opportunity to provide leadership through the mentorship relationship and that there would be enough information upon which to base a reasonable judgement. This seemed to establish a balance between the establishment of strong peer relationships and the requirement for the maintenance of standards and accountability.

Conclusion. By exploring the concepts of peer, supervision, and leadership, the group began to clarify its desire to maintain positive peer relationships that would permit them to provide leadership to their departments in a collaborative environment. Role expectations were seen by the group to include both officially delegated and unofficially assumed supervisory duties. Personal preferences of the participants interacted with faculty, student, and institutional expectations to produce differing views of the practices of the participants. Sensitivity to the label of "boss" and to power differentials with faculty colleagues were uncovered through these conversations.. The conflict that they experienced seemed related to how they could maintain such relationships while at the same time challenge their colleagues to improve their performance through supervisory activities. Some group members both recognized and disliked the power differential between faculty and Chair while others seemed to have resolved the conflict through experience and training. The conversations that explored the concepts of leadership and mentorship reviewed in the next section further elaborate how the more reluctant participants moved to an acceptance of a balance between the two positions.

Leadership and the Chair Role

In this section, I first discuss the connections that the research group made between the roles of leader and mentor as they related to reflective practice, peer evaluation, and the tenure process. I then discuss the power issues associated with the leadership of Chairs followed by a brief discussion of how the group members viewed their workloads relative to these roles. Key in this exploration was the participants' firmly held belief in formative evaluation processes that stressed growth and development of new faculty during the tenure process. The proposed mentorship role for Chairs in the tenure process developed through these conversations. This section is included in order to demonstrate how action research led to the development of a solution with practice implications for Chairs and for the institution.

Leadership and Mentorship

The relationship between the leadership role of Chairs and the establishment of mentoring relationships between Chairs and new faculty was elaborated by the research group. Through this discussion, group members explored ways to reformulate the tenure process into an opportunity for development and for Chair leadership. Areas for exploration included the importance of reflective practice, the dual Chair role of mentor and evaluator, mentorship as an act of leadership, and the formal role of mentorship in the tenure process.

Reflective practice and mentorship. As the problems with the current evaluation system and the ambiguity related to the Chair role began to be better articulated during the second and third group meetings, potential action plans began to arise in our conversations. Siobhan led one of these discussions by suggesting that there were models of mentorship in existence that, when adapted to our situation might be of some value. During her initial two years, Siobhan was mentored by the Chair of her department. She described it this way:

> Siobhan:...what was different with [Chair D] is it was a mentoring thing to go and you could say, "My gosh, [Chair D], I've got this person and I think I blew it and I did it really badly the first time." And the [formal] feedback doesn't come in that first 6 months or that first year for a full time person. It comes later. And that's what they do in [my professional] association. You repeat, you meet with...you go through a mentoring period and you meet with [your supervisor] and you don't write a report on that first year. You meet with them—weekly in some cases—or twice a month to go over all their cases. And they can say, "Well, I did this badly" and it's okay because it's a growth pattern. It's not a judgement. (Group Meeting 3: 689-696)

Siobhan's comments highlight the relationship of trust that she had established with her Chair. She felt free to admit shortcomings in her own performance and to seek assistance. It also demonstrated a sense of patience and encouragement in helping others to grow professionally. There was considerable interest in this approach as evidenced by the following exchange:

> Siobhan: Something like that where there's more frequent contact—
>
> Shannon:...in the first year, it's not evaluative it's mentoring and kind of reviewing and building and developing and then at the end of the first year you begin to evaluate and then make a judgement.
>
> Siobhan: Yeah. But if there's a major flag that would come up from the Dean seeing [the student feedback], like I wasn't aware of the flag that you got in that particular situation. So the [student feedback] came in at Christmas, right? And I would never be aware of that.
>
> Shannon: But we would be working with this person and helping.
>
> Siobhan: And they would be talking about it more and naturally.
>
> Mona: One of the patterns that happens in faculty that are not doing well is that they lack or just are not keyed into being self-evaluative or self-aware. So how do they come to those meetings if they aren't clued into what they're doing wrong? (Group Meeting 3: 702-715)

In addition to reinforcing the importance of mentorship in the first year of a new faculty appointment, this discussion introduced a new concept of reflective practice that had not been discussed prior to this. Mona suggested that establishment of a mentorship relationship between the Chair and the new faculty member could be an introduction to the concept of reflective practice and Chairs could help new faculty to learn the skills would help them to develop as reflective teachers. While there was broad agreement that the mentorship relationship would assist in the development of reflective practice there was also a sense that the mentorship process would help to reduce the anxiety felt by new faculty members as they entered the tenure process. The group felt that without a formal evaluative report, there would likely be more authentic communication between the Chair and the new faculty member. A relationship could be established that would allow the Chair to provide practical leadership and where the new faculty member could benefit from the Chair's experience.

Mentor and evaluator. Given the reluctance of our group members to become formal supervisors and given their preference for a developmental approach in their relationships with peers and new faculty, the mentorship relationship showed great promise. The conversations took on a much more positive tone and there was increasing enthusiasm for formalizing a proposal for change. The issue of having to move from what could become a very intense mentoring relationship between the new faculty member and the Chair to a position of assessment, judgement, and formal recommendation for tenure was of some concern. Meghan began this conversation:

> Meghan: Then you would be switching relationships. Would that be hard to switch relationships mid-stream?
>
> Siobhan: It isn't hard.
>
> Carol: I would think that establishing a rapport in a non-threatening relationship—a way of talking with one another—where a report wasn't attached to it, that would be easier. There is a certain amount of trust, then, in what your role is with that person.
>
> Siobhan: And it's easier to be not negative, to be honest, to provide honest negative feedback because you talked it through and you said, "you know you could [do it this way]"...however gently you phrase it, and if they choose to keep making the same mistake over and over and over and over, then that's a big flag and that's easy to write down. Easier to write down than it is right away. For me that's certainly the case.
>
> Shannon: That's interesting because one of the things I've been thinking about is if—why is it easy for me to give feedback to students? Students who I only see once in awhile, but they come in when they're failing and I have to talk to them about what that means, and why is that okay? But often, it's because I have met them over time and I actually do have a relationship with them and by the time I get to the point where I have to do that, it feels different than for faculty where you pop in only once in awhile. (Group Meeting 3: 737-742)

Later in the same meeting the change in the relationship from mentorship to evaluation was queried again with the following result:

> Meghan: So you would be comfortable doing the evaluative stuff, Siobhan, if you had the first year to be more of a mentor.
>
> Siobhan: It's easier to be honest. (Group Meeting 3: 768-773)

This was further supported by suggesting that the first year of mentorship with a more informal conclusion to the year—without a meeting with the Dean—would feel safer to the new faculty member and would be a better introduction to the concept of reflective practice. The establishment of a relationship between Chair and new faculty and the confidence of having enough information upon which to make a judgement was important in feeling comfortable in moving to an evaluative frame of reference from a mentoring and developmental frame of reference. This was seen as analogous to the relationships that faculty attempt to establish with students. It also suggests that the power differential that exists between Chair and new faculty is analogous to the relationship that exists between faculty and students. The power differential, however, could be channelled in either of two ways—one being the mentorship role which some of our group felt was a leadership role, and the other being the supervisory role which was seen as a management role.

The required change in the relationship between the Chair and the new faculty member was also explored from the perspective of new faculty members. Shannon opened this discussion:

> Shannon: I was thinking that with the change in relationship, the person who is new, the faculty member also knows that the relationship is going to change. I was thinking about the relationship that I had with [my supervisor] when I first started as Chair. She mentored me. But I also knew that she was going to evaluate me. I knew that from the beginning. ...it's not a surprise—so it's not going along being nice and all of a sudden—you know it's not that abrupt. It's a slow and easy transition. And you know all along.
>
> Carol: It's built into the process. So there isn't a turning point. I'm still a mentor in second and third year it's just the process—I'm at the point now when we have to do some evaluation stuff around what we've been working on in the first year. I don't see my role—it wouldn't change—in fact, if anything, if there is trouble, the mentoring would increase. Because now I have a vested interest, I'm committed to this relationship. (Group Meeting 3: 916-927)

Carol's comment indicated the group's commitment to the success of new faculty and their support of increased opportunities to assure that success. There was little concern that the shift from mentorship to evaluation was either difficult or threatening. Shannon's and Carol's comments also provide evidence of the importance of institutionalizing a new practice in order to change the continuing college and department practices. Thus practice, individual attitudes, and group process were linked to organizational change.

Mentorship as leadership. The group continued to discuss how the department Chair could be expected to apply the dual roles of leadership and supervision to a new tenure process for faculty. The following discussion is exemplary of how the group moved toward this conclusion:

> Mona: So is the model, then, adding the mentorship piece to the Chair responsibility? Carve out a mentorship piece and assigning it to the Chair?
>
> Gerry: I think that is what Siobhan is getting at. That would make the evaluation process safer and maybe more manageable personally for the Chair.
>
> Siobhan: And credible. I'm thinking that would feel safer for me as a new faculty. It's a nice way to do it.
>
> Mona: Even for faculty doing well, it strikes me as being a very nice thing so that in that first year they're not struggling with the constant questions of how you're doing. It would be much more frequent interaction over how they're doing.
>
> Siobhan: And then they are not paranoid—is too strong a word—but they have to do this big report at Christmas when they're tired and they're trying to plan for new courses and yet they have to put this together.
>
> Meghan: That is. Their first one.
>
> Others: Oh, yeah.
>
> Carol:...So not only for the faculty member would it feel better but for myself it would feel better, in that, I'm writing—when I do get to that report time—I'm writing based on a lot more experience with the individual....(Group meeting 3: 843-864)

This conversation connected the establishment of relationships between new faculty and their department Chairs with the formal college process for tenure. The suggestion that Chairs should be "assigned" the mentorship role seems to suggest that without such formality, the mentorship relationship might not develop or perhaps that it would not be accepted as credible within the tenure process. The conversation also demonstrated an effort to take into account the feelings of both the new faculty member and the department Chair recognizing benefit to both. Further conversation suggested that the mentorship could also incorporate discussion of course materials, examinations, assignments, and presentations. Meghan and Mona recounted that when Mona started at the college, this was the relationship that they had established and continued throughout Mona's first year. When asked if that was helpful, Mona replied:

> Mona: Yes it was. If you're working on something in isolation—it's just way faster to have somebody with expertise to give you some feedback—rather than the slow, trial and error learning curve. (Group Meeting 3: 885-886)

Mona's and Meghan's recollections of their own experiences, Siobhan's experience of mentoring and evaluating probationary individuals in her professional association, and Shannon's experience of mentorship followed by evaluation in her Chair role were important confirmations that the process was viable and beneficial and that the switch in the Chair's role from mentorship to evaluation could be reasonable and comfortable. This also confirmed that the dual roles of leadership and supervision, while being seen as very different, were both reasonable expectations of the Chair role.

Tenure process and mentorship. The requirements for a formal and standard approach to the evaluation of a probationary period were considered at several stages in the development of our proposed solution. The current requirements were for an identical process for each semester of the three year probation period which amounted to a total of six identically formatted reports. Shannon's experience on the Professional Standards Committee provided some insight here. She said that "...one of the things that we heard was that repetitive stuff was not useful to anyone." (Group Meeting 3: 945) Carol suggested the following to replace this repetitive process:

> Carol: There would be a reflective piece for that first year's experience....But that still doesn't have to mean that they don't do anything in the first year. If anything, they should be goal setting...and looking at what skills they're learning. (Group Meeting 3: 942-950)

Safeguarding academic standards and assuring quality of instruction to the students were important to Carol. She wanted assurance that new faculty would still be involved in a rigorous process in their first year. Safeguarding standards and quality assurance appeared to be a significant consideration not only because there was an expectation from administration to do so but because the Chairs were committed to their colleagues and to their students. Follow-up discussion suggested that the Student Feedback Instrument results would still be sent to the Deans. If there were very serious issues, the Dean could intervene in the process. This concern was reiterated in a different way by Meghan in this conversation:

> Meghan: I get scared thinking about a process that—will it really help us to help people that really need help? You really want to be sure it will.

> Mona: The kicker there, right from the start was the inability to be self-aware, the inability to set goals or to recognize that whole self awareness, self-evaluative cycle....
>
> Shannon:...[I'm worried about] failing someone because everyone has at least one strength you can work with. Let's be careful that in this process that we don't set up a process that only focuses on development. That we really do have to have a way to say, "You're gone." (Group Meeting 3: 1090-1128)

Continued ambiguity in the Chair role was evident related to the concepts of development—"help people that really need help"—and the rigorous application of standards in the tenure process—"That we really do have to have a way to say, 'You're gone' ." Participants had to be assured that there were enough safeguards in the proposed new practice of evaluation that quality would be assured and their programs would continue to be successful. The continued pressure for accountability being experienced by academic administrators was reinforced by the intrinsic motivation to provide quality programs. The contrasting role of building a relationship that could provide the opportunity to help new faculty was the balance that group members tried to rationalize.

Tenure decisions. The research group still faced the question of how the final decision would be made to continue the probation period or to rehire a full time term-certain faculty member. Again the issues related to maintenance of a high quality program and the building of a positive work environment for the future were very important. Mona suggested:

> Mona: What if the year end report commented on the mentoring relationship rather than on the competency? Would it be enough information without perhaps jeopardizing the [mentoring] relationship quite so much? So you would write the goal set, these were met, moving on to these goals, this is what happened...Almost like a report on the self-reflective process. And how that was emerging. Because you feel safe with someone who is really self-reflective. They can have a bad day, you can give that observation but if the self-reflective stuff is happening, I know I relax with that. I kind of feel that it's in good hands. And [that] particular situation when it [was] terribly problematic, that was the piece that was missing—was that ability to do that self-reflective process. It was not there. (Group Meeting 4: 449-453)

At several points in the project Mona affirmed, as she did in this excerpt, her belief that self-reflective practice was vital to the success of a faculty member. She implied that virtually all other shortcomings could be addressed through reflective practice. The solution to the issue of switching from a mentorship role to an evaluation role during the probationary period might be solved, according to Mona, by removing the requirement to evaluate performance against the standard expectations outlined in the faculty evaluation policy. Instead, the evaluation would be restricted to the self-reflective ability of the new faculty member. The group seemed to implicitly believe that mentorship would naturally lead to or at least support reflective practice. The group did not speculate on how the mentorship relationship would specifically motivate new faculty to be more self-reflective and there was little or no discussion about the conditions that would lead to some faculty being more self-reflective than others. Instead, the group members seemed satisfied to provide the space and time for the mentorship relationship to develop and for the conversations regarding teaching practice to take place. Should a second cycle of action research take place, the effect of mentorship of new faculty on their ability to be self-reflective might be an interesting question. In concluding the discussion regarding the mentorship report, the group reached the consensus that the follow-up to the mentorship year report would be provided by the Dean. In that report, a recommendation for continuation or non-continuation would be made without assessing the competence of the individual relative to the formal faculty role expectations after the first year of probation but based solely on evidence of reflective practice.

Conclusion. While there remained differences in the views held by the various members of our group relative to their role of supervisor, there was little doubt that leadership was an important Chair role and that mentorship provided opportunities for leadership with new faculty. This led the group to propose the new system of evaluating new faculty that permitted the expression of a leadership role and led to a more comfortable role in the supervision of new faculty. The reluctance of some group members to participate in the evaluation of peers—particularly related to tenure and hiring decisions—seemed to be mitigated through the establishment of more resilient relationships with new faculty. Through a mentoring relationship, the Chair could provide guidance and assistance while at the same time have enough contact to establish a reasonable understanding of that person's future potential. The opportunity to practice self-reflection was seen as a cornerstone of this relationship and a deciding factor upon which to make a judgement about the potential of the new faculty member. The confirmation of this approach to balancing the dual roles of relationship building and accountability—described by the group as leadership and supervision respectively—was provided by Meghan's, Mona's, and Carol's experiences. Formalizing the mentorship year within the tenure process was the group's strategy for causing the shift in the practice of the institution.

Chair Credibility

The research group suggested that Chairs must be seen to be credible in the mentoring relationship in order to be effective in their leadership role. Three major components of credibility were discussed by the group including: the skills of evaluation and mentorship, the perception that Chairs had the required knowledge gained from their own experience as teachers, and that the mentorship and evaluations conducted by Chairs had to be based on sufficient contact with and knowledge of the new faculty member.

Skills for evaluation and mentorship. The new understanding of the Chair role developed by the participants gave rise to a discussion regarding the selection of Chairs. Mona stated:

> Mona: It has an interesting connection to the increasing accountability for the Chair. [The college] has to be more careful about who is in the Chair position. You couldn't just flip into it 'cause it now requires a skill set. Not that Chairs did not require a skill set before but that's—
>
> Gerry: And you know, with some departments, it has been such a struggle to get a Chair because none of them feel like they have the skills they need or they don't want to do that or—
>
> Mona: Or you get somebody who really wants to do it but doesn't want to do that part of it well. (Group Meeting 2: 1264-1271)

These comments provided an indication that the supervisory/management role was linked to the new reality of increasing accountability in post-secondary institutions now being experienced by college departments. This implied that Chairs needed skills related to supervision, mentorship, and coaching currently not normally included in the preparation and training for academic Chairs.

As the project progressed, there was recognition that there would be a shift in the expectations for Chairs that would include mentorship and higher level skills in evaluation. Mona began this conversation:

> Mona: I have a question…from the Chair perspective we really then are looking at a skill set that Chairs have to have and have to be good at.
>
> Gerry: All of it is quite trainable.
>
> Carol: And a lot of it—I do believe—that many of us do informally anyway. And it's not that I want to formalize any of that but I think process-wise it would just make things so much better.

> Shannon: What we actually do is not going to change.
>
> Carol: I don't think so. (Group Meeting 3: 1022-1032)

The focus on the quality of the interaction between the Chair and the new faculty member led the group members to suggest that training and discussions with other Chairs regarding best practices would overcome initial uncertainty related to the new role expectations for Chairs. This had been discussed earlier when Meghan related her story about training being an essential component of her feeling comfortable with the dual role of mentor and supervisor. Group members implied that "being good at it" was directly related to credibility of the Chair. When discussing their general uneasiness regarding supervision, Shannon and Siobhan in particular, expressed their lack of confidence in conducting performance appraisals and in being recognized in a power role relative to their peers in their departments. Without an appropriate "skill set", as suggested by Mona, there would be little credibility for the Chair.

One possible interpretation of Mona's comments is that not all faculty members might have the skills required to carry out the complex approaches and practices that would be required, first in establishing an effective mentoring relationship, and second in shifting this relationship to one of evaluation. This would require a different screening process in the appointment of Chairs than was the current practice. A second interpretation would be more related to the training and development of faculty members as they assume the role of Chair. The orientation for new Chairs would have to include the development of mentorship and evaluation skills which would be a departure from current practice. Establishment of credibility would likely be enhanced in either case. Further to this, Shannon pointed out:

> Shannon: Then I think it would never be appropriate to have a Chair with full [teaching] workload release [to do Chair duties]. Because I think, one of the perceptions is that when you have a Chair with full [teaching] workload release, you've really lost touch with the classroom. I'm not in the classroom, I don't do [practicum] supervision. I don't do [seminars]. Sometimes I do workload overload so that I can do that. We have to be careful of that because how can I mentor someone as a teacher if I don't have the credibility because I'm not working with students in the same role?...
>
> Siobhan: We need a person, when they are Chair to have taught before. So that they have the credibility. It's like a counsellor in a school. You have to have taught before you go into counselling or there is not credibility. (Group Meeting 3 1042-1047)

The implication of this is that the Chair must feel competent as well as having the external perception of credibility in order to be effective in this role. Both Shannon and Siobhan stated that credibility in evaluating teaching depended on current or at least recent teaching experience.

Information for credible evaluation. At issue for at least two participants was the feeling that they did not have enough information upon which to base a fair assessment of a faculty member's performance. Siobhan said this early on in the project:

> Siobhan:...The thing that destroys me with our...evaluation system is that we look in on a class, we're not subject experts in that class and we can see the soft stuff. And that's true but part of what we're evaluating on should be content in an academic institution. If you don't know the content, then it's an unfair evaluation. I can go in music and I can look at all the classroom dynamics and classroom management and student/teacher relationship but they could be teaching total garbage and I would not know that. And we don't have a piece in our organization that looks at academic credibility....
>
> Mona:...Because you can't detect shallow content. Particularly if the presentation is excellent.
>
> Gerry: Particularly if you're only observing one class. How can you possibly do that?...
>
> Siobhan: And that's all we see. (Group Meeting 2: 751-775)

At our next meeting, Siobhan expanded on this issue:

> Siobhan: The quick and dirty aspect of it is really negative. ...As peers or as Chairs we're going in for once, and looking at a class and we can say, for a first year, that's really good, this isn't quite as good as the lesson you gave last year but it's new content. Maybe not write that down, but know it. And unless students come to complain, we don't really know and we don't have a lot to judge on—and to write a peer evaluation on the basis of one visit is really silly to be used as a hiring or firing instrument. Because it's a one-shot deal. And it's not typical and you can't tell that much....
>
> Shannon: I think we do have more information, though. Because I certainly have a lot of information about how people work with their peers and how they work on teams and how they—their contributions to the department and those kinds of things— (Group Meeting 3: 553-567).

Lack of discipline expertise and single classroom observations seemed to be significant contributors to the overall discomfort in our group in conducting evaluations, judging the competence of peers, and in taking responsibility for peer supervision. In the case of discipline expertise, the dissonance may be related to the significant expectation present in all institutions of higher learning related to specific discipline knowledge. In a small college such as ours, it is often difficult to provide subject experts to judge the content of the teaching that is delivered. This leads to the situation described by the participants where the commentary and subsequent judgement of competence must be based on the observation of teaching skills. While Siobhan felt uncomfortable about this, Shannon suggested that she had ample information to make judgements related to teaching expertise and fit with the department. The second concern rests with the perception that one visit to a classroom does not give enough information upon which to judge teaching competence. As the project plan developed, this issue began to be resolved as the concept of the mentorship relationship evolved in which the Chair would have much greater contact with a new faculty member. With this added information, the Chair could act with more confidence both in the mentorship/leadership role and in the evaluation/supervision role. This added confidence was seen as a contributor to the credibility of both roles.

Conclusion. Chair credibility was seen by group members as an important rationale for establishing the mentoring relationship. Credibility was related to selecting the "right" people for the position of Chair as well as providing training in the skills of mentorship and providing feedback. Credibility was also related to having enough information about, and spending enough time with, new faculty members to make tenure recommendations that were well supported with evidence. This seemed only to partially address the issue since there was also the concern that Chairs often find themselves in the position of evaluating faculty outside their own discipline. The inability to judge academic expertise might continue to challenge Chair credibility. The group did not pursue solving this issue further. This implies that the rigour attached to the mentorship and teaching skill evaluation would suffice in making decisions regarding tenure. Since the evaluation would be largely based on teaching skill and interaction with peers in the department, the group also felt that Chairs should be actively engaged in teaching during their appointment as department Chair. This would provide some defence against the criticism of administrators losing touch with the classroom—a criticism often raised in questioning of pure administrators. While credibility and confidence were potential positive outcomes, the issue of Chair workload began to be a more significant concern considering the added time required to perform more observations and increased time in conversation with the new faculty member.

Chair Workload

Workload was signalled as an important issue that should be explored if our proposed new practice was implemented but there was no agreement in the group on the extent of the problem. Concurrent to our research project, the Professional Standards Committee continued its work on restructuring other components of the faculty evaluation policy including some items that would have a direct effect on the workload of Chairs. Increased responsibility was being placed on the Chairs to conduct faculty evaluations for part time staff and many Chairs felt, according to some members of our group, that this was a further example of downloading administrative work to the Chair position. Our proposal had the potential for a similar response since the time associated with mentorship of new faculty would undoubtedly be greater than that required in current policy.

Discussion of workload issues arose as we discussed the effect that our proposal would have:

> Gerry: This would be very active involvement with the Chair as opposed to a one step observation. So we'd want to make sure that we provide the space and the time for that active involvement. (Group Meeting 3: 952-953)

The time impact of a more intensive relationship between Chair and new faculty might require adjustments to workload assignments for Chairs in addition to the specification of new duties. Group members then speculated that the time required during the mentorship year would have many variables including the number of new faculty in the department, the relative size of the department, and the needs of the new faculty member—some being more needy than others. For example, a new graduate with no training in teaching and little teaching experience would likely need much more time with the Chair than a new faculty member who was a seasoned teacher from another college and who had experienced rigorous review processes and professional development in teaching. This variability meant that the Chair workload would have to vary depending on the situation. In answer to a discussion of these issues, I began by suggesting:

> Gerry: Workload definitely has to be worked through. We have to do something with that. And I'm not sure exactly how to do that. One of the things that strikes me is that if there is a big workload issue, and it looks like money would probably solve it—which I think it might. It means a little more time on the part of the Chair to do this—and some training. But mostly time.
>
> Shannon: So more of the Chair's time by giving the Chair more workload release from teaching. Or in my case, giving more admin support so that there's less administrative tasks. (Group Meeting 5: 404-410)

The following is another example of these exchanges:

> Gerry: We should not let [the workload issue] get in our way just yet. Ultimately, someone is going to say that the college is not going to pay the bill for this so forget it. But I'd like to press it as far as we can.
>
> Carol: I think it's important to have the conversations because there will be the resistance right away. It's good that we talked about how to work around those barriers.
>
> Meghan: But we really do it now without [extra] workload [release].
>
> Carol: Because I'm a little department but I was thinking that I can't see it taking any more time. Now it will be a formalized process for the faculty member too. I don't see it being more.
>
> Shannon: I think it will be easier.
>
> Meghan: I think it will be way easier. I'd rather sit down with someone for an hour and help them develop goals than write a silly report. (Group Meeting 5: 1065-1079)

While there were many potential situations that could have a very significant effect on the workload of a Chair, Shannon, Meghan, and Carol thought that in most cases the impact would be minimal and that any special circumstances could be managed in the annual workload assignment process. Because all the Chairs in our group believed strongly in mentorship and the development of reflective practice, their Chair roles had always included such interactions—especially with new faculty. Shannon's preference for this kind of interaction likely led to her comment that she would find this approach "easier." Since the existing tenure process did not specify such interaction, the mentorship relationships normally engaged in by the participants were not generally accepted practice across the college. Some group members commented that the Chair workload would not change substantially except to move informal practice into the realm of a clear role expectation for Chairs. Members of our group speculated, however, that this would be a substantial change in the role expectations for some current Chairs.

The workload of department Chairs, as described in this section, was not seen as a particular issue by this group because they already informally practiced the processes outlined in our proposal. They felt that there would be little or no extra work in the new policy related to part time faculty evaluation. The only difference would be the formalizing of an already informal process. Instead of choosing to rehire or not rehire a part time faculty member exclusive of the evaluation process, the two would be linked and more consistent. All group members expressed their preference for carrying out conversations with new faculty members about their performance rather than writing an impersonal report that often was not very helpful for development purposes. This was likely a contributor to the feeling that the mentoring process and the changes made to the requirements for formal reports would not increase their workload substantially. They also felt, however, that there were many department Chairs in the institution who did not practice a developmental approach to peer observation and evaluation, and for them, this would likely impose a substantial workload increase. The impact of having many new faculty members at one time in a single department would likely have to be dealt with through a reassignment of other duties in the department.

Conclusion

While the research group did not explore all avenues ofleadership related to the Chair position, they formulated a plan that would create the opportunity to provide leadership to new faculty. Through the exploration of their experiences in mentorship activities, they were able to propose a formal role for Chairs that encompassed their desire to promote the development of new faculty during the tenure process. Role conflicts were anticipated as Chairs moved from mentor to evaluator but group members felt that the extra contact and information gained during the mentorship process would give them confidence in formulating a thorough assessment. During these discussions, the participants also became more accepting of both their leadership and supervisory roles leading them to issues related to balancing these roles. Accountability issues continued to be raised throughout these discussions pointing out the influence that this part of the college culture had on the individuals in the group. The pragmatic concerns related to Chair workload suggests that group members were able to relate their conversations to their day-to-day practice which supports the practical utility of action research in the institutional setting.

Discussion

The issues discussed by our research group relative to the Chair role were related to the issues described in the literature of the past 30 years. This project helped to position these issues relative to a specific action research context and to trace the effect that action research had on the participants and their relationship to that context. I have only included the literature that helped to elaborate the discussions that developed through our action research process. Such discussions emerged throughout the project including the research context analysis, the problem definition, and the proposal for action. Through this analysis, it has been demonstrated that although the group did not frame its conversations in the context of the literature, their personal experiences and the knowledge constructed from their dialogue could be verified through the more broad understanding of the role of department Chair in higher education institutions. Role ambiguity, management and leadership roles, relationship building roles, role expectations, accountability expectations, and personal preferences were topics explored by the research group that can be correlated to the literature on the role of the department Chair.

Role Ambiguity

Because our college had undergone a series of cultural and structural changes, the role of department Chair in our institution had undergone significant change over the past 15 years. From a more traditional role of department Chair during the mid 1980s where the Chair was responsible for all managerial roles in the department including evaluation of faculty, the role evolved into the management of largely clerical functions as our senior administration attempted to centralize authority for decision-making—particularly financial and personnel decisions. Two subsequent changes have restored the academic administration to a more traditional structure but, as evidenced in the work of our research group, the traditional role of the Chair has not been completely re-established and the institution has not clarified its expectations for the role as clearly as it should.

Role ambiguity has been a hallmark of the position of department Chair in academic institutions since its inception (Tucker, 1992; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Seagren et al., 1993; Hecht et al., 1999; Lucas, 2000; Walvoord et al., 2000; Gmelch, 2004; Wolverton et al., 2005; Chu, 2006). The research group required considerable time to clarify their roles and how they personally related to those roles especially in the acceptance and understanding of management and leadership functions. Tucker (1992) and Hecht et al. (1999) point out that the work that Chairs actually perform is usually a blend of expectations placed upon them by faculty, administration, and students, and the choices that Chairs make individually are often based on their own preferences and skill level. Because the Chair role at our college has undergone significant change with no clearly articulated role expectations, the practices of department Chairs vary across the institution. The language used to describe the role often leads to considerable ambiguity. Thus, the discussions regarding supervision and review, leadership and management, and leadership and supervision were significant explorations of participant researchers' experiences and the meanings that they attached to the terms. All the Chairs in this study reached a consensus on the general meanings of the words even though there were still some lingering doubts about their desire to participate fully in the activities connected to the definitions.

Management and Leadership

True to the literature on the role of Chairs, our group agreed that the terms supervision and evaluation were connected to the term management and that leadership was more related to mentorship and development. This is consistent with the discussions of Tucker (1993), Gmelch and Miskin (1993), Hecht et al. (1999), Lucas (2000), Bowman (2002), and Chu (2006). Management is described by these authors as being connected to carrying out the routine work of the department regarding the completion of regulation-specified bureaucratic processes, the evaluation of staff, faculty workload assignment, and the allocation of resources within the department. Leadership is related to the orchestration of long-term planning, influencing department climate, mentoring faculty, and setting departmental goals for professional development. Our research group categorized these roles in roughly the same way. In our study, the areas of evaluating, supervising, and mentoring faculty were of concern. In many instances in our conversations the denial of one or more aspects of these roles was quickly challenged by other group members who pointed out that the actual work performed by each of them did encompass all these tasks. While not wanting to be a "boss", two participants readily admitted that they made decisions congruent with the role of "boss." This discomfort is stated well by Buller (2006):

> At most colleges and universities, department Chairs are expected to conduct annual, face-to-face evaluation sessions with faculty members. Despite the great significance of this duty, many department Chairs are not trained in the basic techniques of how to conduct performance appraisals and, as a result, feel uncomfortable whenever evaluation sessions occur. (p. 81)

This comment by Buller is also consistent with the issues raised by the research group regarding the skills required of Chairs and the issue of Chair competence. Tucker (1992) described the importance that Chairs placed on their various roles. He pointed out that university and college Chairs differed in the importance that they placed on the evaluation of faculty for tenure, raises, and promotions with university Chairs rating it in the top ten and community college Chairs much lower. The reluctance to participate in faculty evaluation/supervision was clearly demonstrated by three members of our group. Further exploration showed that their reluctance could be partially explained by the training and experience that each had or did not have relative to this work. Gmelch (2004) provides some insight into this widely held concern when he describes the failure of institutions of higher learning to adequately prepare academics for a move into administration. He suggests that this failure is as much a function of competing values of narrowly focused expertise for faculty and the requirements of broad-based awareness and generalist characteristics required of the Chair as it is a product of lack of attention.

Relationship Building

The concern expressed by group members regarding the relative impermanence of Chair positions—a rotational position in our college—and the consequences for the long term working relationships amongst their peers were also consistent with the literature on the role of the department Chair. Tucker (1992) stated: "Chairpersons are the only academic managers who must live with their decisions every day" (p. 32). He went on to say that department Chairs had to teach in the same department alongside their colleagues and had to maintain a family-like relationship in the department. Their time at the college and their time as department Chairs provided the participants with experiences making them especially sensitive to protecting future relationships with their peers. Hecht et al. (1999) state that rotational Chair positions are often "regarded as a necessary chore that good citizenship obliges one to shoulder periodically" (p. 6). They go on to state that:

> Since Chairs live literally in the midst of their 'citizenry', they are acutely aware of the fragile nature of their authority. Formal position endows Chairs with very limited power or authority. Their ability to lead effectively, therefore, must drive from sources other than that of positional authority." (p. 6)

The recognition of their fragile authority suggests that Chairs must use personal leadership skills in order to enact the leadership expectations that have been placed on them by their peers, the institution, and themselves. Some group members felt uncomfortable with evaluating their peers and expressed their concern about the issue of credibility. Their wish to be effective in their role of Chair was likely a motivation for being very cautious about committing to an evaluative process. By focussing on credibility issues and developing competence in evaluation and mentorship, the participants seemed to be attempting to create more opportunities for effective leadership.

Expectations for the Chair Role

Conversations regarding roles, expectations of the institution, expectations of peers, and the personal expectations of the Chairs in this study suggest an even more fundamental contradiction in the college's expectations of department Chairs. The roles of gate-keeper, quality assurance, and coordinator of activity may be so difficult to balance with the leadership roles of consensus building, maintenance of collegial relationships, goal-setting, and support of professional development that almost all faculty members would have difficulty in balancing them. It may not be reasonable to have such broad and foundational institutional responsibilities resting on the shoulders of this single group of faculty members. It seems, however, that both senior administration and other faculty are increasingly expecting department Chairs to be responsible for all these functions. The department Chairs in this study tended to find different parts of their Chair responsibilities problematic or ambiguous suggesting that the skills and preferences of individuals matched some but not all institutional role expectations. Only two of the Chairs felt that the balance was manageable but both expressed their distaste for the purely managerial tasks that involved routine administration duties such as budget or workload assignment. The broad and varied expectations being placed on Chairs should be re-examined with a view to determine how reasonable it is to expect such diverse and potentially conflicting expectations—particularly when very few faculty members are prepared with any formal training to accomplish the tasks. The addition of a new, formalized mentorship role for Chairs that resulted from this action research study might have further complicated the role expectations for many Chairs at the institution even though the Chairs that were part of this study felt more comfortable with this approach.

Another source of discomfort expressed in our discussions was the lack of information that Chairs were provided in the existing evaluation process that would be required for a credible faculty performance assessment. Tucker (1992) described this concern as a significant source of stress in the role of Chair. He suggests that this is often coupled with the loneliness of the position since there are few people to offer advice and there are few precedents to follow. This was a clearly expressed concern in our discussions. The proposed changes in the evaluation of new faculty were partly shaped by this issue. The mentorship year was designed partly to provide significant contact and opportunity for observation and conversation resulting in a solid information base upon which to make a judgement regarding the success of a new faculty member.

Accountability

A major theme in our conversations was the institutional expectation of maintaining standards and being accountable for the quality of programs. This institutional expectation was supported by the Chairs' personal motivations to do quality, meaningful work. It seemed the maintenance of good quality and the nurturing of relationships that provides for meaningful work seemed to be at odds thus adding to the essential conflict in the role expectations that department Chairs have of themselves. While quality of programs has historically been a concern for most faculty members, the changes in higher education over the past 15 years have brought the issue of accountability to a more visible and public level. Making sure that colleges are keeping the right faculty, making sure that we are able to determine their skill level, and helping to develop them into better teachers and department members seem now to be normal expectations for department Chairs. This is supported in the literature. Hecht et al. (1999) speak of "new accountability issues" that have influenced higher education administrators to measure and report productivity publicly and to government funders. They suggest that:

> ...although these messages are addressed to university administrators, performance can take place only at the department or program level. Therefore, university administrations have urgent need to bring department Chairs into the leadership circle of their institutions. (p. 16)

They go on to say that "accountability initiatives designed to monitor the quality and cost effectiveness of higher education have increased the importance of the department Chair's role" (p. 23) and that "...Chairs are the guarantors of department quality. In fact, Chairs are the only administrators with delegated responsibilities that allow for a direct influence on program quality" (p. 24). Evidence from our conversations would suggest that this was a source of motivation to participate actively in the area of faculty evaluation and faculty development. In our college, the public (governmental) requirements for accountability have been enacted in many practices throughout the institution many of which have impacted the Chairs for many years. The difficulty that was expressed by the Chairs in this study, however, was related to parameters of quality not normally described in institutional discourse. For example, the proposal for change in the tenure system included a report describing the quality of the mentorship year and the degree to which the new faculty member engaged in reflective practice. The introduction of this new discourse into the institution marked a shift in the meaning of quality and a change in the criteria used to apply accountability. It also marked the efforts of our research group in modifying the institutional expectations of quality assurance and accountability.

Chair Role in Orientation of New Faculty

The product of our action research project is consistent with the leadership role of the Chair related to the integration of new faculty into the department. The participants described the negative effect that the current system of tenure had on individuals, the lack of developmental focus, and the general sense that the current practice was a waste of time. The value of the proposed change in the tenure process was validated by the Chairs in our group that had informally practiced the mentorship of new faculty or had experienced this form of introduction into the college themselves. They were also convinced that such a relationship would also provide ample opportunity to assess the potential of the new faculty member for the purposes of tenure appointment. Buller (2006) provides a strong argument for the creation of a "faculty first-experience program." She also suggests that a combination role of both formative and summative performance review with new faculty is not only possible but necessary and recommended. This approach is very similar to that developed by our group and now incorporated into the practice of our college. Tucker (1992) referred to this process as "performance counselling." He states:

> The Chairperson—initially, at least—is perceived by the new faculty members as the leader, for he or she knows about the local folkways, the institutional pitfalls, and the way in which a faculty member may succeed professionally….someone must tell newcomers about the department's traditions, its goals, and its place in the college and in the institution. Someone has to tell them about the feuds within the department, the idiosyncrasies of its members, the whole rhythm and flow of department life. In short, someone has to socialize the new members, else they are likely to have a bruising first year or two. In some quarter, this bruising experience may be viewed as a necessary rite of passage, but it is nonetheless an inefficient use of time and resources and can be of seriously damaging experience. The Chairperson or a trusted faculty member must conscientiously train new members. The Chairperson cannot ignore these matters; for the general welfare of the department, he or she must take a personal interest in new faculty members." (p. 36)

Tucker's statement regarding the initial perception of incoming faculty that the Chair is a leader was mirrored by the participants in our study. The Chairs in our group would have used the term "mentorship" to describe the "performance counselling" role described by Tucker or the "faculty first-year experience described" by Buller. Both authors, while concentrating on the socialization of new faculty members also spoke of the requirement to assist new faculty to become teachers—a role for which they are rarely prepared given the training they receive in graduate schools (Buller, 2006; Tucker, 1992). Hecht et al. (1999) provide an outline for the process of performance counselling describing it as a "year-round activity" including both formal and informal evaluations and goal setting. This corresponds very closely to the process suggested by the proposal from our action group.

Preferred Chair Roles

As the Chairs in our group debated the roles which they felt were necessary for the Chair, the roles which they had personally experienced, and the roles that they personally preferred, there emerged a consensus about the blend of management/supervision and leadership/development roles that they would feel comfortable in enacting relative to new faculty. The result was the proposal for a new approach to the probation/tenure process for the college which was now incorporated into the new policy on faculty performance evaluation adopted by the college. Our proposal and the resultant new policy for the evaluation of faculty are consistent with the following statement by Chu (2006):

> As difficult as evaluation of one's colleagues may be, it is, nevertheless, a requirement of professionalism. It is easy to rationalize and say "I'm not an administrator, and I'm not paid to judge my peers." In reality, a justification like this only passes the buck. Responsibility is passed onto central administrators without the benefit of an important review from the faculty side of the house. The department Chair sits in the transitional position between faculty and administration. Chairs are uniquely qualified to evaluate faculty since they are so much more familiar with the faculty, their work, their relationships with colleagues, and everyday interaction with students and staff. Like medical doctors and lawyers, the faculty are professionals who have been given the responsibility of knowing enough so that only they may judge their peers. That moral responsibility, plus the fiduciary responsibility and knowledge that a tenure decision is a multimillion dollar commitment, argues strongly for the importance of the department Chair's evaluations of faculty and staff. (p. 70)

The understanding gained by the research group related to the issues pointed out by Chu was critical to the success of the research project. Through the conversations related to the role of the Chair, their personal experiences, their aspirations for their departments, and their concern for the quality of their programs, the participants were able to plan and implement a change in the institution that would make their work as Chairs more meaningful to them.

Conclusion

The ambiguity and conflicting views of the various role expectations of Chairs played an important part in the determination of the problems being experienced by the department Chairs in this group. Through their exploration of the concepts of supervision of peers, institutional expectations of accountability, the importance of peer relationships in maintaining a positive work environment, and the leadership role that department Chairs can play in nurturing a positive, professional academic environment, the Chairs in this study touched on the role ambiguities and conflicting expectations that are inherent in their positions. While the solution that was proposed by the group and later incorporated into the college evaluation system may have brought more clarity to their role, it may have heightened the conflict between those roles by introducing a new, formal role in an already complex set of expectations. In addition, the new discourse applied to the accountability expectations within the college could increase the conflict that many Chairs already face in justifying the institutional call for efficiency with the time requirement for the establishment of meaningful relationships, reflective practice, and leadership as expressed through the practice of mentorship. The solution proposed by our research group introduced the concepts that the group felt were most important in assuring the success of their departments, in making their roles more congruent with their preferred ways of expressing their leadership, and in justifying their role expectations with those of the institution. If the action research project were to continue, potential research questions should focus on the effect the new tenure process had on other department Chairs and on new faculty.

The process of action research helped each participant to clarify perceptions of role expectations through conversation with others whose knowledge and experiences differed from their own. The shared understanding that developed was evident in the development of an agreement on the problem and on the proposed solution. This provided the space and the time for the sharing of knowledge, the construction of new knowledge, and for the exploration of problems associated with the role of department Chair and supervision of "peers."

CHAPTER SIX

ACTION RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

In the two previous chapters, I explored the relationships of participant action researchers with our organization and with their roles in that organization. In this chapter I present and discuss the effects of our action research project on the participants and on the organization. The data for this section of the study comes from research group meetings, my interviews with each participant, and the institutional events related to the project. The interviews with each participant researcher occurred after our first Group Meeting and after the seventh Group Meeting. The second interviews followed the first by approximately one year. The analysis of this data provides insight into the action research process as it applied to an institutional setting and the influence that it had on the participant action researchers. This chapter opens with a discussion of the participants' motivations to participate, their expectations, their agreement on rules of engagement, and their reactions to the process. Of particular interest was the influence that the process had on the participants' relationships to their role of department Chair and to the college organization. The action research group also explored various aspects of the routinization of the action research from the point of view of time considerations, ownership and equality of participation, participant membership, and institutional influence. The chapter closes with a discussion of the validity of this action research study and the factors that would affect the incorporation of action research as a routine practice within a college.

Action Research and the Participants

An analysis of the observations and reactions of the participant researchers provides insight into the effect that action research had on the participants. The learning expectations of Group members arriving at the first group meeting included: how action research is conducted; the use of group conversation to gather data and to establish meaning, understanding, and context; and the formulation of an action plan based on that shared knowledge. The group began with discussions focused on peer supervision, the role of Chair, and action research as a methodology both in response to my call for volunteers (Appendix A) and to their reading of my research proposal. In order to assess the value and efficacy of action research as an institutional practice, my analysis will include the participants' motivations to participate, their establishment of rules of conduct for the group, their reactions to their participation in the study, the influence that action research had on their perception of the Chair role, and the effect that their contextual analysis had on them.

Motivation and Expectations for Participation

The initial motivations to participate that were reported by the group members provides insight into the context for group formation and activity. All the participants indicated that they volunteered because they were interested in learning more about action research and because they were interested in helping me with my research project. The volunteers had all worked with me before in some capacity. I had supervised three of them at one time or another during the previous 15 years and the other two had worked with me on various college-wide task groups and committees. In most cases, I was in a leadership role in those interactions. In their interviews, the participants were all interested in an applied research activity that would result in some action. They also indicated that the project had good potential for exploring their own understanding of college culture and their place in that culture. For example:

> Carol: I am interested in exploring more about leadership from the Chair. [I] have a better understanding from the [first group] meeting. The project could help—it's more practical—some application. I like that. Not research for the sake of research. I want to learn more about research and how to use it. I think I will learn more about myself—it's a very open group with differing experiences. Their perceptions are so different. (Carol Interview 1, p. 1)

Carol was encouraged by the practical focus of the research study. She also had a very positive view of the potential for the project despite the negative views that had been expressed in the first group meeting regarding power relationships within our organization. She indicated that she expected to explore the Chair role, that her views would likely change through the conversations, that she hoped to develop new leadership skills, and that the project would provide an opportunity to try new things.

Meghan's responses to questioning about expectations demonstrated a different starting place than Carol's and were indicative of her more extensive knowledge and experience in both qualitative research and in the role of department Chair. Meghan indicated that her understanding of action research was confirmed by our first meeting and that she expected to learn more about its potential application through this exercise. Meghan stated: "I realize more about the applicability [of action research]—more about its validity and relevance—how it might be important to change at the college" (Meghan Interview 1, p. 1). She suggested that she and Carol already had a project in progress for which this methodology was especially suited and that this study would help her to gauge its usefulness. As our project unfolded, Carol and Meghan discussed their work in that other project as a form of validation for both projects. Of great significance to Meghan was that "action research pays attention to iterative process—always ready to change" (Meghan Interview 1, p. 1). Significant here is the positive disposition to change and openness to learning that Meghan shared with Carol.

The motivations of Carol and Meghan were echoed by the other group members who indicated a strong potential for learning about the action research process, increased understanding of themselves and their work environment, and the potential for applicability in other settings. In addition to these views, Shannon pointed out that after the first group meeting she had "...more sense of involvement—more ownership—a more active role" (Shannon Interview 1, p. 1). Shannon, like Siobhan, however, did have some reservations about the group. Shannon said, "...[it] could end up not making a change for all people in the group—won't be easy for everyone in the group. [The project] could make significant change...diversity is apparent in the group" (p. 1). Siobhan commented that she initially volunteered only because I was the one asking for volunteers. While unspoken, Siobhan's sense of obligation stemmed from my support as she completed her doctoral studies when I was her Dean. After her first meeting Siobhan said, "I now have a better idea—I'm starting to understand the personal benefit and the growth of knowledge—I'm less sceptical" (Siobhan Interview 1, p. 1). She indicated that at this point she did expect that she would change. This would be an "...attitudinal change—it may be infectious—it could spread" (p. 1). Siobhan went on to describe why her initial scepticism was partially mitigated. She suggested that while the volunteers were so different attitudinally, there was a very positive atmosphere in our initial meeting. She said she was particularly impressed that the conversation seemed not to be "directed." The observations of both Siobhan and Shannon suggest that, at this stage of its development, the group had concentrated on the differences in the group. Later in the project group members became concerned that they were too like-minded to be broadly representative of the college. This indicated a substantial shift in the climate of group. The conversations during the study that clarified understanding and awareness and in the negotiation of consensus likely helped the group to increase its focus on similarities rather than on differences.

Since the first interview followed the first Group Meeting in which the ground rules and area of interest were established, all participants agreed that they would be able to work well with the group. All had worked with each other prior to this project and they expected one another to listen, contribute, and be respectful of one another's views. This last point was of significant importance when we considered the backdrop of distrust and peer group issues that characterized their initial contextual analysis. When asked what they had to contribute to the study, the participants were all quick to point out that they had considerable experience in the institution, that they were interested, enthusiastic, and energetic in their pursuit of change. Since we had already discussed the theory behind the study and the process of action research, all participants felt that, once they had experienced the activity, they would likely find application for it elsewhere. Carol was particularly interested in the opportunity to "try things out—pique the interest of others" (Carol Interview 1, p. 1). She saw it as an opportunity to connect with colleagues on other areas of concern besides those of students and curriculum. Shannon felt that there were other interactions at the college that were similar to action research but did not bear the label. This participative style of change management felt "familiar" to her and she felt that it would definitely apply to her area of involvement at the college.

From this description it can be seen that from the outset the participants shared enthusiasm for the opportunity to work together, to learn about action research, and to contribute to the college. They began the project with an attitude of self-efficacy where they expected to contribute substantively, to fully access the knowledge within the group, and to trust one another. This was borne out in the group meetings following the initial interviews in the ways that individuals felt free to express their views—even those that might have posed considerable risk had the conversations been divulged to others in the college.

Rules of Engagement

The group created an environment of safety and authenticity through its early discussions. This analysis illustrates the application of action research principles to an institutional setting where participants normally do not explicitly define such parameters. The rules included ethical considerations that were shared with the group prior to the first meeting as well as those negotiated by the group members during their first meeting. Confidentiality, mutual consent for disclosure, and respectful disagreement were important points of consideration contributed by group members.

Setting the rules. As the group facilitator, I began the first meeting by suggesting that the group establish the ground rules for confidentiality and management of our meetings. During this conversation, group members contributed their own expectations regarding their personal responsibilities to each other. For example:

> Siobhan:...it's sort of with the...dynamics of the group...not general dissemination except the parts that are deliberately meant to be. So that we can be authentic. (Group Meeting 1: 14-16)

Shannon added: "And when we have a discussion it's about the idea not the person. ...I think we can assume that, but I wanted to say it out loud." (Group Meeting 1: 25-26) This was summarized by me with consensus expressed by the group:

> Gerry:...I think we have to be explicit about that and we should be able to say exactly what we feel about this stuff and trust that it will stay within the group. It's at the point of disclosure of the information that we have to agree on what that disclosure is. (Group Meeting 1: 28-30)

These comments indicated the expectation that group discussion would be kept confidential unless there was agreement for disclosure. Shannon's comment regarding discussion about ideas without personal attack and without suspicion of others' motives introduced the concept of respectful disagreement. Group members expected that this would create an environment of safety and authenticity implying that there would then be freedom to fully explore personal observations and interpretations of workplace issues. This was demonstrated in the discussions presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Using the rules. An example of the negotiation leading to disclosure of knowledge developed by the group was the discussion of our proposal to the Professional Standards Committee during Group Meeting 6. This disclosure is contained in the "Background" and "Current Issues" sections of the document (Appendix D). The following excerpt indicates the tone of that conversation:

> Shannon: This is to go forward to the standards committee?
>
> Gerry: I'm thinking that the standards committee will own the final justification for this. It's not like you would have to defend it in perpetuity. [laughter]
>
> Shannon: If we get on this committee we will.
>
> Gerry: Ultimately it's going to be a decision or a proposal from the standards committee. If they accept it then they will do the FAQs and they'll do—just to let you know—
>
> Meghan: We're protected by the ethics of the research. [laughter]

> Gerry: Absolutely. And a lot of our discussion that went into this, all the stuff we talked about—the context, the faculty association issues, and all of those things are not here. I felt that was more sensitive information than we needed to defend and we will not have the benefit of those long conversations with the standards committee or with anyone else. It's hard to get the understanding of that and the context as we discussed it. (Group Meeting 6: 214-234)

In this exchange, the group reiterated that there had to be agreement with the final disclosure of information and with the final document. The negotiation in this passage reveals a sensitivity to the audience receiving the proposal and to the apparent credibility of the argument being presented. Framing the disclosure with its context was important because without the conversation that generated the knowledge the information presented could be misunderstood. This led to an extensive discussion regarding the careful selection of words that would be contained in the final submission to the Professional Standards Committee.

Reflection and evaluation. Comments made in the final individual interviews with participants indicated that the initial rules of engagement were both supported and practiced during the entire project. Carol stated, "I always felt safe to express my opinion and not agree" (Carol Interview 2, p. 2). Meghan reported that she felt that she was able to be "authentic and honest" in expressing her beliefs and feelings. She felt there was acceptance of people's ideas. In her first interview, Siobhan indicated that she thought the participants were respectful, that there was an expectation that all would listen, and that there was "no expectation for agreement or consensus." In her second interview, Siobhan described participants as "genuine and not political"—that they had a better understanding of each other and their ideas. Siobhan's comment regarding "political" referred to the interactions amongst the research group members as opposed to the actions taken by the group or their micropolitical analysis. Siobhan often expressed concern regarding power relationships, that she did not want to be a "boss" and that she did not want to force her values and goals on others—all indications of her negative view of political behaviour among her peers. Shannon stated that the first meeting gave her a positive outlook supported by "respectful conversation and trust." In her closing interview, Shannon added that the process was "respectful, engaged, trusting, and that it was easy to disagree" (Shannon Interview 2, p. 2). Mona indicated initial frustration with what she described as superficiality, but over time, she observed that the conversation deepened and became more engaging. She attributed this to "lots of room for participation and an expectation of sharing" (Mona Interview 2, p. 2). Mona expressed similar views when she stated that the conversations were "approached with respect—did not violate the basic pillars" (Mona Interview 2, p. 2). She indicated that there was no "grandstanding" in the group. I shared the view that all group members supported and demonstrated confidentiality, respectful conversation, withholding of judgement, and probing for understanding.

While the group expressed a common view supporting the importance of the rules of engagement in their final interviews, this view was also apparent in Group Meeting 7 which followed the presentation to the Professional Standards Committee:

> Siobhan: And it was good that very early we had the freedom not to agree. So it was okay to [disagree]—none of us pouted and took it personally if you didn't agree. And that didn't carry through, it can be quite destructive to some meetings so I really liked that. (Group Meeting 7: 253-255)

Siobhan's comment indicated her trust in the group and in the conduct of our conversations. She had initiated the discussion regarding rules of engagement at the outset and her interest in evaluating our adherence to the rules was understandable. Other group members seemed more content to leave them implicitly understood. In a related comment, Mona explored how this action research activity with its rules of engagement differed from other activities in the college:

> Mona:...One of the things that we dealt with early on [was] one of the constraints regarding what is our negotiating room. I've often thought that one of the big problems that [our college] encounters internally is a lack of trust. This inability to trust each other and to sort of manage it. But these [action research] groups seem to break that. They seem to create trusting groups....a little more freedom explored, because they are not afraid of what their neighbour is going to do or what or how the information is going to be handled or something. It creates a freedom to be good problem solvers. That's what I feel here. I trust you guys with what I would say. (Group Meeting 7: 384-391)

Mona's statement captured the general sentiment expressed by the other group members as we concluded the project regarding the expressed values related to personal safety, trust, respectful conversation, and permission to disagree. An important outcome for Mona was the recognition that action research provided an organizational space that encouraged respect for diverse perspectives and the opportunity to experiment with solutions to real problems in a safe environment.

As the project concluded, the research group reaffirmed their commitment to the initially agreed upon rules of engagement. Throughout the project confidentiality, respectful disagreement, authentic conversation, trust, and personal respect for each other were carefully safeguarded. The sense of personal obligation to other group members was a major group characteristic that developed over the fourteen month project. In my role of initiator, facilitator, and internal observer, I learned that these factors were important to the success of our action research project.

Learning About Action Research

Although the participants reported in their final interviews that their initial impressions of the project did not change substantially during the project they did report a deeper appreciation for the personal impact and usefulness of action research. Participation in the action research study led to increased confidence that: action research could be a catalyst for change, it provided space and time for the development of new knowledge, the changes introduced were more likely to last, the process had prepared them to be more accepting of new ideas, and they had gained skills in recognizing connections and patterns in the organization. Some participants did not recognize these benefits as being part of the 'action' in action research. As a result, they felt that success would only be realized if they had contributed to a lasting organizational change.

Experiential learning. Group members had expected that the research would eventually lead to an action that would either change institutional practice or their own practice related to peer supervision in the organization. Meghan was the only participant who appeared surprised by the progress of our conversations. She stated that she did not anticipate the philosophical perspective that was taken in the first few meetings or that it would develop into specific action. She described it as an "emergent process":

> Meghan: It totally developed from a different view. The philosophical perspective was a surprise. It started phenomenological—an emergent process. The generic discussion moved into a change focus. I thought it would be more of a discussion focus. It ended in something tangible. ...Anything is possible. Change can happen. Never say that's just the way it is—everyone has a chance to change things. The cultural impact was real. (Meghan Interview 2, p. 1)

Meghan's comment taken from her interview following the project is an affirmation of her view that action research had potential for catalyzing change in an institutional setting and that the emergence of group generated knowledge could lead to action and change. Meghan suggested that virtually anyone could accomplish such change given the opportunity to do so. For her, there was an unexpected tangible result. In contrast, Siobhan's cognitive understanding of the process was not changed during the project but she indicated that "feeling it happen is different from intellectual—the actual is different from the theoretical" (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 1). For Siobhan, experiential learning had provided her with a deeper understanding of action research. A similar sentiment was expressed by Shannon. She said that she had a new awareness of how to use "experiential knowledge to develop new knowledge. It did happen and it happened naturally. Conversations led to new understanding" (Shannon Interview 2, p. 1). Mona expressed a similar view when asked what she had learned from her involvement in the project:

> Mona: I have more confidence in the process. That's the biggest one. The right people in the right context do get work done. It's a healthy experience. I will trust it more. I'm less cynical. This worked out. (Mona Interview 2, p. 1)

Mona's observations indicated that she knew about the process but through participation, she was more likely to apply it herself to other institutional problems. She had gained trust in a process that she had regarded with some cynicism. Mona qualified her trust in the experience with her reference to the "right people in the right context" indicating a lingering suspicion that the process would not always have positive results. From comments of Meghan, Siobhan, and Mona, it can be said that action research was, for them, an experiential learning event. Their participation provided a deeper awareness of action research which could be used in their own practice of leadership in the organization.

Time requirement. Through her concurrent involvement in another group that was exploring a different issue, Carol recognized a new appreciation for the importance of allocating sufficient time for understanding and building rapport. She stated:

> Carol: Because we used a similar process in our [inter-departmental] Group, I now understand the importance of taking time to understand. I have new patience in listening. You have to develop rapport and take the time for it. Also being results oriented with no specific goal. It doesn't seem like you're being pushed. Change is at a more fundamental level and will last. It gives time to get in a new place. I'm not afraid of change but I am opposed to *being changed*" (Carol Interview 2, p. 1)

While her theoretical understanding of action research was clear from the outset, Carol's experiences taught her the importance of building rapport, listening, the emergence of knowledge through conversation, and allowing time to assimilate ideas. Carol viewed the emergent nature of the problem identification and its accompanying solutions as important to the ownership of change and its potential to last. Siobhan spoke of this important distinction in her first interview when she said, "...an imposed change would be a detriment." Both Carol and Siobhan shared the view that they resented being pushed to change unless they had a clear understanding—and perhaps clear ownership—of the change process. In an atmosphere of cynicism, caution, and wariness of change, the action research process provided a vehicle for genuine collaboration. With no preconceived action plan and the opportunity to fully explore personal observation and experiential knowledge without judgement or personal risk, the research group was able to feel empowered to act.

Recognizing opportunities. Meghan indicated that she had gained better insight into the usefulness of "maverick thinking"—avenues that at first seem too bizarre to pursue. This was exemplified earlier in her exploration of having the faculty member being evaluated write the observation report based on the debriefing conversation. This concept had been raised in an off-handed comment by a colleague in a Dean's management group. As she described that event, Meghan suggested that the understanding that she gained from our research group discussions provided her with the knowledge to connect these "maverick" comments to the issues related to peer review. The roles of "synergy" and "serendipity" were reinforced for Siobhan. She gained new knowledge in how ideas are proposed to and spread within an organization. Both Meghan and Siobhan stated that the knowledge of the organization that they gained through their exploration of institutional issues set the stage for taking advantage of opportunities for action that might arise. For Siobhan, the concurrent events within the college at the time of our conversations in the action research group provided an opportunity for change that would not have been apparent or acted upon without our group's intervention. Action research seemed to have an influence on the organization that expanded beyond our own group boundaries.

Catalyst for change. The individual interviews also explored the potential of action research as a catalyst for change in our college environment. All the group members were convinced that action research could result in real change. Mona suggested the process was "a good model for problem-solving" (Mona Interview 2, p. 1). Siobhan responded to the question by stating that because "action research created an environment where people were genuine—not political—major changes could have bigger buy-in, better understanding—and if the topic was unscripted—you could let it go. There would be excitement—it's infectious—energy is created." (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 1). Siobhan's connotation of "political" in light of her other comments, as strategies used by unscrupulous individuals seeking control through manipulation and dishonesty. In hind sight it might have been useful for us as a group to more fully explore the meanings of 'politics' and 'political' to better understand the organizational micropolitics.

In her response to the question about a catalyst for change, Shannon stated that she saw "endless opportunity" for action research to be used as a change process. She suggested that her own experience in this project was indicative of how it could impact others:

> Shannon: I expect that I will become a champion of this approach to change. I was changed personally showing me that a shift in beliefs is possible. There can be real cultural change and practice change. There is full engagement of participants. I'm going to talk it up with [my department] and I will encourage the researchers in my [professional organization] to use it. The profound change for me was my personal view of my role as [department] Chair and leader. It could also help faculty to see themselves as interdependent. (Shannon Interview 2, p. 1).

Shannon's comments reflect the enthusiasm that was generally evident within the group during and after the project. Her reference to shifting beliefs, cultural change and practice change are consistent with Shannon's comments throughout the project. She referred to the change within herself as profound indicating that action research had the capacity to effect such change. In Shannon's case, 'action' within the action research process included personal change that she had experienced during the project.

'Action' in action research. Shannon's view is contrasted by a slightly different interpretation of 'action' in action research. While the area of exploration was known to the whole group, the outcome was not. It grew from our conversations and from our knowledge. Conversation and individual change were not considered as 'action' in the following conversation:

> Meghan: It really was an evolving process this whole—like I didn't have an idea that it would result in this document. It was kind of just a discussion about culture that evolved and grew and developed. And so it's a really good example of the nature of action research, isn't it?
>
> Gerry: No, I had no idea that—
>
> Meghan: Like I didn't even think that we would end up with anything. And that in the end it was more than just talking about things—no, I really didn't.
>
> Gerry: Well, I was hoping we would take an action because in an action research project it should have—[laughter] so I was really hoping [that it wouldn't fail].
>
> Shannon: But it didn't.

> Gerry: Well I don't think so, we'll see. We haven't taken the action yet. So, no, I had no idea.
>
> Meghan: I think that's neat, really.
>
> Gerry: I thought at one point we might actually just get one or two members of the group to actually try something, I thought that might be possible. But this kind of emerged. (Group Meeting 6: 242-266)

The group had voiced their view that the outcome was an emergent one—that it arose from the conversations about organizational characteristics, history, and the context set by the project parameters. The meaning of 'action' in action research was not explored by the group but from this exchange, it appeared that the group did not value the conversation and deeper understanding that developed to the same extent that they valued a concrete, tangible activity—one that would clearly demonstrate lasting change in the organization. Material change in practice, in this case, would likely signal success whereas the building of new knowledge alone would not. Meghan's assertion that "we wouldn't end up with anything" suggests that she did not consider personal change in individual group members as a distinct outcome of action research. Rather than being an action, conversation was "just talking." In their final interviews, group members all recognized the positive effects that resulted from their participation but they probably would have agreed with Meghan and me that the measure of success depended on tangible change in institutional practices. They likely did not consider the conversations as 'action' within action research. By implication, personal change was not explicitly linked to institutional change.

Conclusion. Overall, the group described valuable effects from their participation including a deeper understanding of action research as a catalyst for lasting change, that it provided space and time for the development of new knowledge, that their new knowledge prepared them to be accepting of new ideas, and that they had gained skills in recognizing connections and patterns within the organization. The participants also reported that their participation had given them the confidence to apply action research processes in other settings in the college. Carol and Meghan used the example of one such application in the exploration of unified programming and administrative structure amongst three currently separate academic departments. They drew on many analogous circumstances and activities from that group to enrich the conversations in our research group. Both Meghan and Carol suggested that the work of our group was an important influence on the work in their other group. The apparent unequal value placed on personal outcomes versus institutional outcomes provided some insight into the participants' perceptions that conversation and building knowledge were not 'actions' and as such would not be success criteria. Finally, while participation in the project provided a valuable experiential learning opportunity, the unusual opportunity to reflect on that learning during the closing interviews likely enhanced this learning.

Role of Department Chair

Just as participation in action research provided deeper understanding of action research, it also provided the opportunity for new understandings related to the leadership and supervision roles of department Chairs. In conversations about the various roles that were part of their formal leadership positions, the group discovered a wide variety in their interpretations of 'supervisor', 'manager', and 'leader'. In this context, the concepts of 'shared' and 'distributed' leadership were explored. The group did not reach consensus on the meanings of these terms and two participants reacted negatively to the term 'distributed' because it seemed to reinforce power differentials rather than reduce them. As the research progressed, the group recognized that they could accept more leadership responsibility in the tenure process for new faculty thus sharing responsibility that had formerly rested completely on the Deans. The proposed changes also developed the space and time for relationship building that would provide opportunities for leadership. In the final individual interviews, each participant was given another opportunity to express their understanding and relationship to these concepts. Of interest to me was the contribution that action research provided to the achievement of this new knowledge.

Mona provided insight as to the possible consequences of distributing leadership. She suggested that she supported the concepts of distributed leadership and shared responsibility through the more clear understanding of what these terms meant to her:

> Mona: I really support the notion of distributed leadership. Academics don't always know what to do with leadership. They're capable people who often flounder at leadership tasks. Distribution helps to develop that. It leads to mutual respect, power balance, collaboration…(Mona Interview 2, p. 5)

Mona implied that leadership skills could be developed through practice and creating opportunities for leadership to emerge. In the same interview Mona reported that she had more confidence in her ability to exert leadership in our college as a result of our conversations. She seemed to have felt affirmed by the other leaders in the group. Carol also expressed a positive view of shared leadership during her second interview but cautioned that the sharing of leadership and responsibility must be real and well supported as opposed to token and manipulated. Carol indicated that she had gained confidence in her ability to provide leadership. She stated, "I can see how a Chair can be a peer first, can build trust and rapport—that it evolves and gets stronger" (Carol Interview 2, p. 4). In this way, Carol, like Mona, described a new understanding that the change in practice would create the opportunity to build a leadership relationship with peers.

By contrast, Meghan was initially a strong believer in the concepts of shared leadership and responsibility. In her second interview, she indicated that she tried to practice shared leadership all the time—"I give people choices and lots of say in what they want to do—a collaborative operation" (p. 5). She added: "...action research feels like forward movement" (p. 5). It produces "synergy—people grab on to it. There is passion." (p. 5). Meghan felt that this excitement and joint ownership increased the potential for true shared leadership and responsibility. Meghan also felt that her participation in the group helped her to gain more confidence in her ability to lead. She said, "Every small success adds to growth." Meghan's comments suggest that she saw the process of action research as a way of sharing leadership because of its collaborative nature and because it provided the opportunity to realize a way of capitalizing on the contributions of all group members. Meghan's learning was related to her use of action research as a leadership tool and as a way of sharing leadership.

For Siobhan, the words "shared leadership" still had "little meaning." In her second interview she said:

> Siobhan: I don't know how to respond. The words have little meaning. Leadership implies responsibility and accountability—not everyone wants it. Everyone wants to do the best they can. Action research might bring more understanding but creating opportunities is more important than distributing it. (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 5)

Siobhan's comments are consistent with many statements that she made throughout the project suggesting her concern that leadership should never be imposed. This comment supports the comments of others that action research and the change recommended by the group in the practice of faculty evaluation can create opportunities for leadership to occur. Similarly, Siobhan reacted negatively to the word "exert" when asked if the project helped her to gain confidence in her ability to exert leadership. Siobhan still remained a reluctant leader, even though our conversations clearly established her in that role. She did concede that the project had provided "new learning" in the area of leadership and that her “outlook changed.” She seemed to be more accepting of a leadership role that stressed personal responsibility and shared leadership. Her “changed outlook” implied that she also accepted a broadened leadership role when cast in terms of mentorship and development.

Shannon expressed her distaste for the term ‘distributed leadership’. Shannon’s comments implied that the power differential between those in formal authority positions and others in the organization would be reinforced when one group or individual ‘distributed’ leadership. Shannon suggested that leadership should be earned. She preferred the terms ‘shared leadership’ and ‘shared responsibility’. In her second interview she said, “Professionals must share to develop.” She indicated that action research was, “…a perfect example of shared leadership. You share work, responsibility, development—there is [illegible] sense of equality but with different roles” (Shannon Interview 2, p. 5). Shannon’s statement is an indication of her view that power differentials should be reduced—if not eliminated. Her reluctance to declare herself as a supervisor was likely a result of this strongly held belief. Her personal justification seems to be based on the premise that leadership is simply a role of faculty members that is neither more important nor more powerful than the other roles of faculty. Later in the same interview Shannon stated that she felt more confident in her understanding of leadership and responsibility and that this was a different understanding than she had when we began. She also stated that she was much more comfortable with her role as leader.

Participatory action research did lead to a deeper understanding of shared leadership and responsibility and helped the participants to situate themselves relative to the roles that they had assumed. Since our group consisted of individuals who ultimately viewed their formal role in the organization as a combined leadership and managerial role, they were able to clarify and explore these concepts and to model how sharing could occur. They suggested that this gave rise to the potential for individuals to feel more ownership of collective actions. There appeared to be a greater acceptance of a more robust and complex role in both leadership and management related to the tenure process as evidenced by the proposal that was brought forward by the group.

Planning Context and the Participants

Because our group had explored the characteristics of our organization that might influence our ability to carry out an action plan, research group participants reported changes in the way that they viewed the organization. All members reported that they had become more likely to analyze the college environment and that they had a deeper understanding that there existed a variety of interpretations of college culture. Included in this recognition was the incorporation of such knowledge in the development of strategies for change. Analysis of individual interview and Group Meeting transcripts provides insight into the changes experienced by the participants.

Points of access. The contextual analysis relative to power structures and political relationships within the organization led the group to develop strategies to overcome the conservative forces that they felt could constrain their proposal for change. In her final interview, Mona suggested:

> Mona: I have more of a sense of possibility in our college culture. It seems like the tightness is fraying—there are more entry points—more access for discussion. Our discussion helped to discover the holes, entry points. It was approached with respect—did not violate the pillars. There was a strategic sense of point of access—where we can make a difference. (Mona Interview 2, p. 2)

Mona's comments suggest an analysis of college culture based on a metaphorical reference to a fortress that requires change agents to break in at points where the battlements are weakest. She uses the terms holes, points of entry, and tightness is fraying. This supports her earlier references to being overwhelmed by negativity and inertia. The implication is that she sees action research as a strategic manoeuvre that can breach the fortress of inertia and negativity. Later in her interview Mona stated that the most significant constraining factors related to our project was the "history and tradition of our college." The "sense of not dreaming big" had been part of earlier group discussions. Rather than testing the process with a small pilot project, the new awareness of "points of access" created the possibility of a more sweeping institution-wide change. Carol provided a similar point of view in her final interview:

> Carol: The idea that Chairs, faculty—peers—have nothing to do with management was the traditional resistance to change. That culture is still here but is moving. The [faculty association] contract people prevent change. (Carol Interview 2, p. 3)

History and inertia seem to figure prominently in Carol's view of college culture that might constrain change. Carol's reference to "contract people" pointed to the small but influential group in the faculty association that felt they were charged with defence of the collective agreement relegating all institutional change to the realm of labour/management negotiation and collective bargaining—a model characterized by conflict, power, and influence. She went on to say that change in the organization supported further change:

> Carol: ...Do it while everything else is new. There are many new faculty—they don't have the history of the them versus us. (Carol Interview 2, p. 3)

This comment is not so different from Mona's analogy of storming the battlements of history and inertia. In Carol's case, she seems to imply that rather than using manoeuvring tactics, a successful strategy would be to simply overwhelm the fortress with a large volume of change and use new recruits to bolster numbers. Both Mona and Carol viewed action research as a way of scouting the planning territory, building support for change, and providing strategies for enacting the change.

Institutional space. In contrast, Meghan felt that her view of the college culture had not changed during the project. She stated:

> Meghan: No. The issues are all still there. They have always been there. I understand them quite well. A shift in culture is happening. A more inclusive culture is developing. Questioning of the Dean is more likely now. The freedom to express views is more prevalent. (Meghan Interview 2, p. 2).

These comments indicate that Meghan saw the value of our discussions as a way of helping to monitor and understand the changes that were occurring in the organization through other activities. Our action research project seemed to provide a forum for the development and sharing of this knowledge but not in the development of a tactical advantage position suggested by Carol and Mona. Meghan later acknowledged that "faculty negativity—paranoia in faculty of a small but influential group " (Meghan Interview 2, p. 3) was a constraining factor but she did not suggest that action research or our activities were really related to that. This view is consistent with the tactics used to introduce the proposal that bypassed any direct involvement with the faculty association.

Understanding the organization. Further reflection indicated that action research provided the opportunity to gain a broader perspective. Shannon expressed it this way:

> Shannon: One thing that was really neat was how I have learned so much about this process. And I've learned so much about how I think about things. When someone holds up a mirror because they look at it differently, I think—But there were some things in those early discussions that really helped me to get a bigger view of the college and I thought I had a pretty big view of the college already. But it really helped me to—I guess to see the college through other people's eyes. One of the comments I remember was we were talking about faculty and how faculty has no power. And I remember it was one of our first meetings and [Mona] said, "Faculty has all the power because when they resist something it grinds to a halt." That was the most powerful statement for me. And I have seen

> that so many times since then. Those kind of things, this opportunity has been terrific for me because I had a chance to see some things I haven't seen before or hear some things but not all related to what we were doing here—there was a whole bunch of extraneous learning going on. Very helpful.
>
> Gerry: Well I'm not sure how extraneous all that is. I think that if you're going to actually have influence, and exert leadership, if you don't have that understanding of the culture in which you're doing it, it's like beating your head against a brick wall. ...
>
> Shannon: I think most of us would have said we had that until we had the discussion. And what happened for me is that it made me realize that I only had a piece of it.
>
> Gerry: Yeah, I see what you mean. Without those more in-depth conversations about that. One of the things that I really have come to recognize is the importance of those conversations.
>
> Others: Yeah. (Group Meeting 7: 280-301)

This exchange indicated the importance that the group placed on seeking to understand the viewpoints of others and how a new frame of reference can be established through conversation. Shannon pointed out that she was able to apply this new knowledge several times in the following months and that her new insights were helpful to her in understanding how she related to her own environment. Participative action research can provide an opportunity that many individuals do not normally experience in their day-to-day work. Shannon's final interview further elaborated this concept:

> Shannon: I hadn't thought of college culture before. I have a clearer understanding of the power of faculty and how they use it—or a framework for understanding it. I now know more about the power of subcultures to influence change in college culture. For instance Meghan and [her department] could effect change but they often don't take the opportunity. (Shannon Interview 2, p. 3)

Like Meghan, Shannon indicated that she knew more about the way faculty power was exerted in the institution which likely influenced our group to propose our change without direct contact with the most conservative element of faculty. Like Mona's locating "points of entry", Shannon's "power of subculture" comment indicated the strength of the consensus that was achieved and the resulting ability to cause change. The subcultures Shannon referred to would also be found in the Professional Standards Committee and the other small groups influenced directly by the members of our group. The group was able to trace some of that influence through Meghan and Carol's discussions with other Chairs in their division, through Carol's involvement in the process sub-committee of the

Professional Standards Committee, through my position as academic Vice President and supervisor of the academic Deans, and through Meghan and Carol's involvement in the task group seeking ways to align three separate academic departments.

Differing interpretations. Throughout our discussions, Siobhan did not always share the views of the group relative to the power that faculty had in our college and the ways that a counter-organization might use that power. She often conceded that there were elements of truth in what was being shared in our conversations but she sometimes pointed out some evidence to the contrary. For her, the project was helpful in understanding these different lenses of interpretation:

> Siobhan: I was reminded—increased awareness that different interpretations exist of the culture—the way people see it and interpret events in different environments. (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 2)

For Siobhan, structural constraints within the college organization were more significant:

> Siobhan: I was frustrated with the chain we had to go through. We had a structural constraint—filtered—interpreted—not a direct action. For me, full ownership was not realized. The action was not direct. (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 3)

Siobhan seems to have suggested that she would have been happier with action that she could have taken personally. In this case, our influence was on a college policy that required formal and bureaucratic processes and which caused others in the institution to carry out the action plan. Siobhan seemed not to feel a direct connection or even shared ownership unlike other group members who seemed to derive considerable satisfaction from the project. Siobhan's feeling of isolation from the resulting institutional changes could be attributed to views commonly expressed by members of bureaucratic organizations. She seemed not to connect her participation in the group in a direct way to the change in the organization likely because our research group was not connected openly with the final faculty evaluation policy. As such, she seemed not to have gained the same sense of self-efficacy as the other group members.

Conclusion. All the participants indicated that they benefited from their new insight into the college organization and their roles in it. Action research helped them to develop a more keen interest in the factors that might affect their influence on change processes and how they might strategize change processes in the future. The deeper understanding of the organization was an outcome of the project as was the discovery of "points of entry" and the recognition of alternate approaches to influence change. Except Siobhan, group members were optimistic about the application of this new insight. When Siobhan reflected on the college's bureaucratic nature she seemed disappointed leading to her expression of frustration at not ultimately owning the change the group had introduced.

Action Research and the Organization

It can be said that the effect that this action research project had on individual participants will have an indirect influence on the college simply through the interactions of these individuals with the organization. The direct influence that the project had on the organization and the potential for continued application of action research in the institution was also explored by the participants. Those conversations encouraged them to reflect on the institutional conditions that would support action research. In this section I will also discuss several qualifiers that were raised by group members in their final interviews that might affect the application of action research as an organizational practice. These comments often indicated that some changes in the organization would have to take place in order for the process to become a regularly applied approach across the institution.

Institutionalization of Action Research

A major focus of this study was to determine the efficacy of introducing action research as a regularly used institutional approach for catalyzing change and solving organizational problems. The participant researchers were asked to speculate on this incorporation as they reflected on the project and their roles in it. The research group suggested that there were several institutional barriers that might pose challenges to widespread use of action research such as: the use of the term 'research', lack of formal institutional sanction, control by management of agendas and outcomes, and adequate time. Analysis of these conversations suggests that group members saw these as desirable changes in institutional practices and they provided insight into the benefits associated with such changes.

Research terminology. One suggested barrier to consistent application of action research in managing change at a post-secondary institution was the use of research terminology. Mona, in her final interview commented that the use of the term 'research' would invite critique based on the concepts of "validity" or "grounding." This is consistent with Mona's comments regarding the use of critique at our college as a method for blocking change In addition, the academic connotation often associated with the term 'research' could introduce a formality of process which often demands publication of results. Mona's concern was reinforced by Shannon when she indicated in her first interview that the action research process was often practiced but was not named as action research. She suggested that a participative approach to problem-solving was frequently used in her professional practice and that she was familiar with the approach. While this was not discussed further, it would be interesting to explore the connotations of research that might pose barriers to participation. In her second interview Shannon said, "I don't feel like a researcher so I might not initiate an action research project" (p. 1). This comment was followed later in the same interview with her response to the question of equal participation in the group where she definitely stated that she did feel like an equal participant.

Engaging participants. Shannon went on to indicate that while she saw significant institutional application, she thought it would be a "challenge" to engage those who were "not interested." This comment is a direct reference to the conversations that indicated concern for the apparent disengagement of many faculty members in college activities. It might be possible to capture the attention of such individuals by convincing them to attend one or two meetings and hope that they would begin to actively participate and build commitment to the group and to the process. Shannon gave some rationale for her optimism regarding overcoming this potential obstacle:

> Shannon: People at the college are generally curious. We want to be good at what we do. We want to collaborate and work together. We have a desire to do the right thing. There is a respect for the humanity of the institution—a desire to help people develop. (Shannon Interview 2, p. 3)

Shannon seemed to be giving a prescription for the attractors that could be used to lure the "not interested" into participatory action research. In Meghan's final interview she also suggested that there "seems to be a shift in culture and the literature advocates a change to a more collaborative and inclusive approach for all leaders" (Meghan Interview 2, p. 3). In the context of this interview, Meghan was referring to a more global organizational culture shift that could provide external validation supporting greater institutional participation. Meghan's comments tend to support Shannon's comments regarding the appropriateness of action research when collaboration and inclusiveness are desired by potential participants.

Promoting reflective practice. Throughout the project, the participants related their conversations to their everyday roles in the college highlighting the influence that action research could have on promoting reflective practice. The link between our project and the everyday practice of Chairs is demonstrated by the following conversation:

> Shannon: The thing I find interesting about this—as being a member of this group—is that I think that for the five years that I was Chair before this, you just sort of did the write-up because that's what you had to do. And this fall, as I've been doing the write-ups for people, I have a sense of how useless—
>
> Siobhan: Me too.
>
> Carol: I have some more useless ones to write this week.
>
> Shannon: I wrote nine evaluations last Sunday afternoon and I thought, "How is this helpful to anyone?" Much of the stuff I had talked to them about so I made a little comment about 'as we discussed blah blah blah', which doesn't tell the Dean a damn thing. So why would I put it in there but yet you have to make some comment to make the Dean aware that you talked to them about 'X' so it really was a useless kind of exercise. It wasn't useless completely, but it was—
>
> Carol: You can see clearly how—
>
> Shannon: And when I think about the conversations that I had with the people about the very things that I was trying to write about, it was much less sterilized in the discussion compared to what I wrote. And was made to look—so they wouldn't look too bad—to try to find a way to say that in the evaluation without making—it's just something to be pointed out to someone that they recognize their behaviour so they can change it the next time. I would really like to see us do something. So I was thinking about sensitizing other people. So if I hadn't been sensitized by being in this group I would have just gone on, doing what I've always done, and if you came to me and said I had to change it, I'd say, "Why, what the hell's the matter with the way I do it now?" Really, because I'm comfortable with what I'm doing now. How do we help others get the sensitivity that we've got? (Group Meeting 5: 114-138)

The time between our meetings allowed the group to reflect on what we had heard and said during our meetings and to validate our understanding through our lived experiences. Shannon demonstrated this as she reflected on the "useless" work she had engaged in during the previous week. She was able to test the conclusions that the group had reached regarding Chair involvement in faculty evaluation. The action research process, the time between our meetings, and the proposed action plan were all reinforced through Shannon's observations and self-reflection. In recounting her experience of self-reflection, Shannon also suggested that others should be encouraged to undertake a similar process. In Siobhan's final interview she provided further support for Shannon's experience of validation of our conversations through experiences observed between our meetings:

> Siobhan:...a disadvantage is the time factor. The process would have been more difficult, though, with a tight timeline. The longer time frame allowed for more processing of information and further information from outside the group. Our meetings were fun and they could have been more often. It seemed like a learning community—a way to change awareness and attitude. (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 1)

Siobhan's comments refer to the disadvantage of using the action research process as a normal practice because of the time requirement. Her comments indicate that she felt the extra time was important and that she wished we could have fit more meetings into our schedule. This suggests that time is required to change awareness and attitude and that the time must be made available even though there was a potential conflict with the institutional resource of time.

Time constraints. Group members pointed out that time constraints were among the potential obstacles to the regular use of action research in the institution. Meghan suggested that time was an issue when she said, "It would be wonderful but it may not be very practical. You have to have the time to make it happen" (Meghan Interview 2, p. 4). She also felt that the extended time between meetings was difficult. She indicated that the pace and volume of her work interfered with her preparation for group meetings. The conflict between the desire to spend the time on a project such as this one and the desire to meet the tight timelines associated with efficiency in the institution was described by all group members. The busy schedules of department Chairs were especially problematic and resulted in prolonging the project beyond its predicted time frame with long periods of time between meetings. For example, the second Group Meeting took place 3 ½ months following the first due to the summer break and the beginning-of-term activities. We met monthly, on average following our second meeting except for a longer break over Christmas of just under 2 months. While efforts were made to schedule more frequent meetings, the busy schedules prevented this. The result was that our project took almost one year to complete. The following provides some commentary about the difficulties and benefits of this aspect of timing:

> Shannon: The first few times I didn't remember what we had talked about the last time. But in some ways that was helpful because what happened then was I didn't have any recollection of what we talked about last time so it was like a fresh start every time I sat down. So we had a clearer view of something that was now a bit bigger than it had been before. Where if we had met more often, I think I would have just put on a lot of what I had said last time which would still be in my head.

> Mona: But there's still opportunity to remember what the streams or strands we would pull forward in interesting ways.
>
> Gerry: It's kind of like the most important things got pulled forward anyway [in the meeting notes], even though some of the detail might…But also I found that I was coming to next meeting with a different understanding than I had started the previous meeting.
>
> Others: Yeah. (Group Meeting 7: 235-246)

These comments provided some rationale for our ability to continue the project even with considerable time gaps in our process. Group Meeting 7 had also provided us with an opportunity to assess what we considered to be a successful implementation of our plan. Shannon's comment, "…we had a clearer view of something that was now a bit bigger than it had been before", was confirmation that her understanding and her ability to take new meaning from the knowledge generated in our meetings continued to grow and develop.

Institutional support. In addition to time considerations we also considered the necessity of creating space in the organization that would support the actions that a group such as this one would propose and enact. Managers would have to relinquish their control of agendas and outcomes of such activities and would have to trust the process as well as the abilities of the action researchers. The following dialogue indicates how the group described these requirements:

> Gerry: Those [conversations] are really really important. And that means that sometimes we shouldn't be so dedicated to an agenda. And you never actually get to the meaning and the context of some of those things…Business meetings on the other hand are not conversations. They are just an exchange of information and that's all. I really think that we should try to find a way to create space and time to do some of this kind of work. It's how do you set that up? How do you manage it? How do you run that? It takes time. Although, if you look at how much time we spent on this stuff, it wasn't huge. It was a couple hours once a month.
>
> Shannon: But there was priority that was pushing us to do it. And I think that's the piece that helped us to stay on it. Where, if you think about the things that we do, we get caught up in the requirements of the day. And so what would go to the bottom of our list of priorities would be— (Group Meeting 7: 302-312)

These comments imply that those controlling the agenda would have to be more flexible and willing to place higher priority on time for authentic and in-depth conversation. In addition, facilitation of that conversation would be required to keep it on track and to remain focused on a particular area of concern. The kind of leadership that would support such activities was then suggested:

> Meghan: You have to have leadership that allows you to do that, too. To move forward and let it emerge. And be willing to make that happen.
>
> Carol: And you can't do that with everything or we would be—[laughter] I think that's a good example of the same kind of feeling as I had coming to these meetings.
>
> Meghan: Yeah, I think you're right, Carol.
>
> Gerry: So when you let things emerge like that, that's real hard for some people to do.
>
> Meghan: Well it's scary because maybe it won't go the way you want it to go. What if that [multi-department] group had said, none of us want to work together? Then, I don't know what admin. would have done then. (Group Meeting 7: 351-363)

Carol's comment highlights her concern regarding the time that action research, conversation, and emerging solutions would take with an implication that this would not be desirable for "normal" college business. The requirement for efficiency might interfere with frequent application of action research in the everyday functioning of an institution. The concern that there would be those who would feel a loss of control over process and outcomes was identified as an additional impediment to regular use of action research as an institutional practice. This was summed up by my statement of what I had learned from our project and from the group participants:

> Gerry: So part of what I have learned from all of this is creating the space and the time. You have to have an organization, people in leadership positions not assuming they have all the answers and there is room to work in that. And that creates the space. And then say "This is going to take some time because we have to have the conversation." And you have to work through it. I think those are pretty important pieces. And everyone talks about that all the time, but we still don't create it.
>
> Meghan: Because time is such a commodity. It's really hard to find time.
>
> Gerry: And yet I think it costs us a lot more time in the long run. (Group Meeting 7: 414-424)

The challenges of trying to incorporate an action research approach in the normal functioning of an organization that are suggested here include aspects of both leadership and efficiency. The ability to relinquish control product and process relates to leadership and taking the time required to explore issues and problems in depth relates to efficiency. My comment refers to the inefficiency of trying to implement change when there is not institutional ownership of the process or the product. Spending the time in an action research process has the potential for increasing broadly based ownership of the project, more effective implementation and a more informed, quality product. In the long run, the process might be more efficient.

Conclusion. Institutionalization of action research as a regular approach to change management and problem solving was seen by the participants as desirable but difficult. They suggested the term 'research' may be problematic in that it carried academic issues that could have a negative effect on effectiveness. Time was seen as both an important component of action research and a potential drawback to organizational efficiency. This established an essential conflict that was confirmed by the participant's experiences in this project. Leadership in the organization was a major consideration in that the institution would have to provide official support, adequate time, and reduced control over outcomes. The group viewed institutional acceptance of emerging solutions and action plans as critical to continued participation in action research projects.

Ownership and Equality

The concepts of shared ownership and equality of participants were considered important to the success of our project and to the success of future applications in an institutional setting. My initiation of this project as an administrator in the organization posed significant risk in terms of assuring the full and equal participation of all group members and the possible institutional perception of co-optation of the group by management. Upon reflection, group members developed a consensus that they had shared equally in defining the problem, proposing a solution, controlling the process, and taking sufficient time to complete the process.

As described previously, there was a sense that any inauthentic, contrived, or manipulated process would serve only to erode the working environment rather than promote the reality of shared leadership. Carol stated it this way:

> Carol: If there was an urgent need for an outcome or if there was a preconceived idea about the outcome, it probably wouldn't work. There has to be a sense that all members of the group are exploring equally. (Carol Interview 2. p. 4)

Carol's reference to "urgent need" was likely a reaction to the very lengthy duration of this research project which was also her experience in the long duration of the other project that she was participating in. The "preconceived idea" comment further supports her view that the "process has to be real and it has to be supported" (Carol Interview 2, p. 5). Similar views were also expressed by Siobhan and Shannon. These comments expose the sensitivity for the potential for administrative manipulation of process that gives the impression of collaboration and equality of participation while simply being an effort to silence potential detractors.

Equality and partnership were viewed as essential in contributing to shared project ownership. In their first individual interviews, the participants were asked if they thought my position (Dean and then Vice President) and my gender (since all the volunteers were women) would lead to unbalanced power in the group. Since the first group meeting had already occurred, all the participants had an initial indication of how the project might proceed. At that time, no one felt that either my position or gender would have such an influence. Part of this had to do with prior relationships that had been built over the years. The participants felt that they knew what to expect of my behaviour and all were confident that they would be encouraged to contribute and voice their own opinions freely. Carol said that I would not affect the outcomes "given the folks at the table." She indicated that "position seemed not a part of our first meeting" (Carol Interview 1, p. 2). Meghan suggested that there would be an impact on the outcomes:

> Meghan: Yes it will because of your authority and latitude. We may have to mandate some things. You might be very useful to the group. The support of administration is always better." (Meghan Interview 1, p. 2)

Meghan suggested that this was a useful tool for our group to use. She confirmed this view in her second interview when she said, "You had the ability to move [the project] forward—some authority—on the inside—we were able to advance the case more easily" (p. 3). In terms of a negative impact on the sense of equality in the group, however, she responded, "Not on this group, they are strong people and we have good relationships" (Meghan Interview 1, p. 3). Shannon suggested that although my relationship with each participant was different, this would not be an impediment. "We all know what we are up against," she added (Shannon Interview 1, p. 2). Shannon also suggested that because all were volunteers, they were expecting to have equal standing. Siobhan also indicated the potential that I could be of benefit to the group because of my access to college decision-making bodies. She cautioned, though, that an "imposed change would be detrimental" (Siobhan Interview 1, p. 2). Siobhan was not sure, going into the first meeting, about the influence that I would have on the group.

She stated that after the first meeting, she was convinced that I did not appear to have undue influence on the group. When the participants were asked about potential gender issues, they indicated that this was highly unlikely and that they had not given it much thought. Because the participants were unanimous in their responses to my question regarding gender issues, we did not explore the topic further. Without in-depth analysis, however, I am not convinced gender based influences were not imbedded in the dynamics of the group or its actions.

At the conclusion of the project, all participants indicated, without reservation, that they felt they had contributed as equal participants. Mona indicated that the "discussions were engaging" and that there was "lots of room for participation" (Mona Interview 2, p. 2). There was an expectation of sharing and she felt that she had done so. Carol stated:

> Carol: I contributed my perception of the Chairperson and I influenced the outcome. I had an impact on the final understanding and my values were part of the final product. (Carol Interview 2, p. 2)

Meghan indicated that she was able to link conversations inside our group with those occurring in other settings. She said that this contributed to the final product and helped in achieving increased external support for our plan. Siobhan stated that she played different group roles in that she "listened, thought, tried to apply, and talked" (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 2). Shannon said that she had "tried to understand others' points of view, offered my own perspective, shared my own feelings" (Shannon Interview 2, p. 2). She also said that she demonstrated a willingness to change which she felt contributed to the confidence in the group.

Given that the participants all felt that they were equal contributors, it followed that they did not feel any undue influence from me either due to my positions (first as Dean, then as Vice President) or my gender. Each participant was asked if my position at the college affected the project outcome, if I had disproportional influence on the research group, or if my presence constrained them in any way. Mona responded to me in the interview in this way:

> Mona: Your influence was not negative—it was a positive way—you brought more broad experience. Your support was more of a safety factor. You provided a voice at different levels of the power structure. You also kept us all at the table. You were very busy, seeking priorities, but the project was more important. No, we were like equals. It felt like a team—a group of people thinking about a project. There was never a feeling that a missing member would end the project. Being there was because it was interesting. (Mona Interview 2, p. 3)

Mona's "safety factor" comment indicates a tie between my involvement and the organizational power structure. These comments indicate the influence that the facilitator of a group such as this can have through behaviour and attitude. The importance that I placed on the project and my continued participation despite a very difficult schedule affected Mona, even though she was unable to attend all the meetings. Her motivation to continue seemed to have been more connected to her interest in the project and her commitment to me personally as opposed to coercion that might have been felt due to my position in the institution.

Siobhan, in her second interview, suggested that because the "activity was carried out in College time" (p. 3) there was an implication of institutional support for the project. I had not anticipated that scheduling several meetings to take place during the normal work day would signal institutional support for the project. Siobhan's comment also supported the "safety" comment of Mona in that my participation, from her perspective, gave the project a measure of credibility from the institution perspective. Support from the college authority structure, although indirect, was assured in their eyes, simply by my presence. Carol's perspective was similar to Mona's. She felt that my contributions were from my perspectives as a faculty member and as a Chair and that I "did not influence the conversation" (Carol Interview, p. 3). Carol went on to say that my presence did not constrain her participation in the group:

> Carol: The group rules at the beginning help set the tone...The project was not directly related to my role, it was very volunteer—not directly related to my job—not a required college project. (Carol Interview 2, p. 4)

Carol's comment implied that a formally commissioned action research group that was directly related to the participants' work and the participation of a person from a formal position of authority would likely struggle with equality of participation. Siobhan's comments extend this concept:

> Siobhan:...That was established early. You acted as a facilitator—not dominated—a different role than in other groups. You were not in a position of responsibility. You set meeting times but not the agenda. You did not take center stage. You were not in a power role. (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 4-5)

Siobhan's sensitivity to power relationships and the importance that she placed on peer relationships devoid of power influences as expressed in many of her other comments placed her in an excellent position to critique my influence on the group. I was conscious of my role of facilitator throughout the project and I was conscious that I could easily dominate the study. This consciousness likely helped to maintain the equality of participation that was apparent in the comments made by the group members.

Group members did not seem to perceive overt manipulation or dominance resulting from my participation or facilitation. Three participants were clear in their view that I contributed positively to the project because of my position and my involvement in the Professional Standards Committee. They did not suggest that I had more than my reasonable share of contributions to the final product. At the end of the project, group members continued to express their view that the problem and solution had emerged from our conversations indicating persistence with their views of collective ownership of both process and product. The usefulness of this methodology might have been more limited if the project was more closely related to the participants' work and if the administrator present was in a supervisory relationship to one or more of the group members.

Group Membership

The makeup of our research group had an impact on our conversations, our proposal, and on our plan. Group members reflected on group membership as a potential influence on our discussions, our proposal, and our credibility as we considered issues of influence in the college. At some points, group members viewed themselves as very like-minded and at other times they recognized their diversity. Diversity of experience and opinion were seen as contributors to lively discussion, constructive disagreement, a stronger proposal, and to external credibility.

Since all the members had volunteered, I was somewhat concerned that only those interested in the focus of the project would come forward. Shannon voiced that concern:

> Shannon: I think the makeup of the committee mattered too. I was a bit concerned at first that we might be all like-minded because we were all here. But it was really helpful that we weren't [like-minded]. And there were people who would challenge an idea or disagree and that helped us to be more—to be clearer as we made our decision about what to do. We were able to take forward a better product because we had discussed it and debated it and argued about it here. That mattered too. You have to make sure that happens. (Group Meeting 7: 213-218)

Since the call for volunteers specified the topics for consideration in the research study I expected that the volunteers would be interested in exploring action research and topics related to peer supervision and leadership. Shannon's comment that "we might be all like-minded because we were all here" was a reflection of that concern. In the protected environment of our group meetings and with the commitment to seek thorough understanding of each other's views, diversity of opinion was valued and useful.

Shannon's conclusion that our product was ultimately improved through this diversity suggests that authentic conversation can lead to the construction of knowledge and a reality that is stronger than that reached without diversity of opinion.

In addition to contributing to a strong proposal, group diversity was seen as a strength in helping to establish external credibility of our proposal. The following excerpt is taken from the conversation where the group negotiated wording in the proposal to the Professional Standards Committee:

> Carol:...I was thinking in the background [part of the proposal document] that—it was five [College] Chairs—but with quite a variety of perspectives. I don't know how you talk about that but they weren't all new Chairs, they weren't all Chairs that have been Chairs for a long time. It was a good mix of backgrounds—a diverse group, I think. I don't know how to say that but it doesn't really—in the background you mentioned talking about cultures—well we were talking about cultures and history and—I don't know that you have to put a whole lot in but it seems--. It wasn't five Chairs that all got together and said we want to change the role. We didn't come here for that reason. It was just an interest in—
>
> Shannon: It was more about being part of the research than the topic itself.
>
> Carol: It wasn't like you gathered five Chairs that wanted to—I don't know how you say it but you know what I'm trying to say? It was exploring—
>
> Meghan: Well it was emergent in nature. And I think that was part of—it wasn't a preset outcome.
>
> Shannon: And I think that what I also hear you saying is that we were not people who came already ready to change.
>
> Carol: No. Not necessarily that we were all dissatisfied with things.
>
> Shannon: Not like we had all the same agenda.
>
> Carol: No. Not at all. And I don't see that in the background [part of the proposal]. I think that has some validity in the first paragraph.
>
> Gerry: If I mention [in the proposal document] that our discussion was not only about the culture of the College but also its history and that through discussion that the action emerged. If I include that in some way would that help? And also mention the diverse group of Chairs.
>
> Shannon: With varying experience and varying opinions. (Group Meeting 6: 277-307)

Carol's opening comments suggest that the Chairs in the group differed in their backgrounds, length of time as Chairs, and in the dominant cultures of their departments. She likely intended to enhance the apparent applicability of the proposal to diverse settings by making these factors known. Documenting this diversity might also enhance the credibility of the group by giving the impression of a thorough investigation from varying points of view. Carol's comments indicated that she was concerned that others might view us as a lobbying group that had been established specifically to influence the outcome of the policy review. From a political perspective, Carol anticipated that a strong negative reaction would counter such a 'power play'. Meghan and Shannon seemed to support this view. They did not want to appear to be members of a group that had arisen with a particular vested interest. They wanted to make it very clear to the Professional Standards Committee that the group had "varying experience and varying opinions." In their view, this would lend credibility to the research aspect of the proposal and provide assurance the Professional Standards Committee that this group had adequate knowledge to formulate a credible proposal. Because group members were well known in the college community, their presence at the presentation to the Professional Standards Committee was expected to highlight the heterogeneity of the group. This was in sharp contrast to comments made by group members at other points in our discussions when they were concerned that our group would appear too homogeneous in our support of developmental leadership and supervision. This helped to explain their insistence on making sure the diversity within the group was well documented in our proposal.

Group membership was linked to internal and external credibility issues. Group members expressed the view that the group was more diverse than they had anticipated it might be and that this diversity provided the opportunity for challenging conversation. They viewed this as a contributor to thorough investigation of issues and to a strong proposal for change. External credibility was important to the acceptance by the Professional Standards Committee. In this case, being perceived as too like-minded would be a detractor to that credibility. As the group negotiated the wording in the proposal, they made sure that the diversity of the group was highlighted in order to establish that credibility. The credibility held by each member of the group individually was not discussed and they did not suggest that the credibility of the group might be enhanced by the credibility of the individual members.

Reaction to the Proposal

The efficacy of action research in an institutional setting can be further assessed by analyzing the way in which the proposal for change was received by the Professional Standards Committee and by the institution. In arriving at the strategy for presenting the proposal, the research group recognized that the timing of our proposal presented an opportunity to influence a change process that was already in progress. A college-wide demonstration project incorporating the new tenure process was possible. The Professional Standards Committee accepted the basic premise without significant debate which seemed somewhat anti-climactic to the research group. The proposed tenure process was incorporated into the new faculty evaluation policy and the institutional discourse contained in the new policy reflected the developmental focus of that process. This section documents our reactions to these events and provides insight into potential application of action research in an institutional environment.

During the last Group Meeting, the group members reflected on the influence that timing had on our success. This reflection stemmed from the need to consider more generalized applicability of action research as a standard practice:

> Mona: Another interesting meta-question which is, what impact on the College collaborative teams like this can have? So not even looking necessarily at what we were interested in but more looking at what is the impact when a group of people with a common interest get together and try to influence an agenda. That seems to be the more interesting. (Group Meeting 7: 197-200)

Mona's comment demonstrates the interest she had in the application of action research to other organizational processes. This view was shared by others as demonstrated in their final interviews and in comments in the group meetings. This interest gave rise to reflective conversations about the process such as the timing issue:

> Carol: And timing was everything. Given what's happening elsewhere.
>
> Gerry: That's part of the importance, though, if you're always discussing and reviewing the context and the environment, the opportunity arises. And you are in tune with where those opportunities are. You can take the action at that point. So when the two of you, for instance, were discussing the bit about peer evaluation with your group, it was an opportunity. You know I think...the time you spend discussing the environment and the context gets you ready for realizing the opportunity. There is an opportunity for us to do this right now.
>
> Carol: Just saying that—what we have been doing elsewhere and what's happening in the College...(Group Meeting 6: 268-277)

Carol's indication that the timing of our project coincided well with other activities in the college provides insight into the potential for a group such as this one to capitalize on the opportunities that arise and on the knowledge developed and shared within the group. The group was well prepared to move its agenda forward once the "points of entry" became apparent. At the next group meeting this was further elaborated:

> Meghan: I think timing is everything. The fact that faculty was so against that other [existing] policy—or there were so many people against it—that then presenting a new one at this time made a difference. Timing is pretty important in being able to influence people or not. And sometimes that's beyond your control, too. (Group Meeting 7: 208-211)
>
> Gerry: Part of the timing issue has to do with spending the time at the beginning [in] understanding the context.
>
> Others: Yes, uh huh.
>
> Gerry: So you don't really see the opportunity around the timing unless you're prepared. You've done an analysis of that. You say, here's our chance because look at all of these things that have come together. ... And now we have an opportunity so—that gave us the idea of the action that we could take...
>
> Meghan: It emerged out of the discussion, actually.
>
> Gerry: But without that discussion of the context, and the culture and the things that we talked about at the beginning, we would not have seen that...as an opportunity to have an influence. It's pretty important to have spent the time on that piece. We spent quite a bit of time on that. (Group Meeting 7: 220-230)

The timing of our project coincided with a college-wide discussion of a new faculty evaluation policy which would update the role expectations for faculty. Had that discussion not been underway, we would not likely have been able to influence the college-wide application of our proposal. Instead, our initial discussions related to a small pilot project would have been more likely to drive our strategy. The college was also involved in many other change processes as we formulated our proposal including a new administrative structure, new administrators, new program development and a new building project. Such wide-spread change likely prevented the more conservative forces within the organization from focusing on change in tenure processes. Our proposal was greeted with less fanfare or controversy than we had expected.

During the final Group Meeting, we spent time discussing our impressions of how the meeting with the Professional Standards Committee had gone. Siobhan was the most notably doubtful of our success:

> Siobhan: I felt okay at the meeting. I didn't sense a huge buy-in. But I thought there was more of a one. And then, when the Professional Standards Committee gave their report to the faculty association meeting I had expected that they would speak of it and [they didn't]. I was surprised. And then it felt like it wasn't really something they wanted to do.
>
> Shannon: They didn't say anything about it?
>
> Siobhan: Not at all. That surprised me.
>
> Meghan: [The Professional Standards Committee] had a meeting last week, though. Didn't they have a meeting last week?...
>
> Gerry:...what happened was that they have assumed that [our proposal] is going to go in the [final policy] document. ...we're starting to draft the policy—and [a member of the committee is] going away to change the procedures document to include our proposal in it. And it's going to be in the new draft.
>
> Shannon: I thought that what we talked about was so close to where they were already thinking that it was just another step for them.
>
> Siobhan: But it wasn't at all what they were thinking. It was new. It was different from what they had.
>
> Meghan: But the theme of more involvement by the faculty was kind of a theme that was running through their thoughts about change. (Group Meeting 7: 28-58)

Group members tried to rationalize the lack of in-depth questioning at the committee presentation by suggesting that our proposal must have been similar to the committee's current direction. Siobhan countered that view justifiably since all the drafts of the new policy up to that time had not included a developmental focus, the mentorship role of Chairs, or any reference to a new tenure process. Our reception at the Professional Standards Committee could be attributed to the face validity of the background, issues, and proposed solutions presented by the research group. This could be interpreted as confirmation that the research group had been able to apply its collective experiential knowledge in the solution of an institutional problem in a manner that was acceptable to the organization.

A discussion of what had taken place since our meeting with the standards committee provided information that described some unexpected and perplexing events. For example, we learned that Carol had been called to another faculty evaluation process sub committee meeting to discuss the addition of our proposal to the faculty evaluation procedures. This would finalize the procedures in the new policy for the standards committee. Carol reported:

> Carol: I'm on the process sub committee. And a lot of things that we talked about in this [research] group were things that we had talked about in that subcommittee. Maybe not exactly the same words but I think what you were saying Mona is that we were not that far off but we certainly put more details of how it could work. (Group Meeting 7: 66-69)

Carol's interpretation further supported that our proposal was meeting good acceptance and that the incorporation in the new policy was almost assured. This also suggests that our group members influenced other discussions in the college and that those outside discussions contributed to our own discussions and resultant action plan. Due to the iterative process that we engaged in and the length of time between our research group meetings, the exact nature of this influence would be difficult to ascertain. For example, Meghan and Carol had a discussion in their Dean's management group regarding the writing of peer observation reports as a result of their work in our research group. While it became part of our proposal, it had already been added to the new policy by the Professional Standards Committee because their Dean had already brought it forward for inclusion. In her final interview, Siobhan indicated that she had come to realize the importance of formal and informal networks in the college that were powerful ways to spread ideas and gain input (Siobhan Interview 2, p. 3). These networks seemed to have been at work in preparing the standards committee for our proposal.

Further discussion regarding the meeting with the standards committee and a meeting that Meghan had attended with a Dean's advisory group revealed some disappointment with the level of in-depth discussion. This excerpt is indicative:

> Mona: And that was my sense of what their questions were about. They were implementation questions rather than questions of philosophy.
>
> Meghan: That's kind of what I thought too. There were not a lot of deep questions about philosophy at the Dean's meeting. Its more about working, implementation. The idea was not debated really. (Group Meeting 7: 71-75)

Our group was prepared with a comprehensive philosophical and practical justification for our proposal and were disappointed that we were not asked to discuss those issues. This could have been because there were no department Chairs on the standards committee and the impact on Chairs' roles and responsibilities would not have been as serious a concern for the committee. All the philosophical issues that we had explored related to leadership, supervision, mentorship, and power differentials were not paramount in the minds of the committee members. They were more concerned with the logistics of procedures that would safe-guard standards and lead to a fair but rigorous tenure process. In addition, when we had explored the organizational context in our study, the group had suggested that while faculty seemed to value critical analysis, they rarely engaged in authentic conversations that supported such analysis. The interaction between our group and the standards committee was evidence of this.

Our proposed approach to the tenure process was subsequently embedded in the new policy. Various members of our research group attended divisional Chair group meetings to explain the new approach to tenure. The questions continued to be related to logistics and Chair workload and not the philosophical aspects related to the new developmental focus. These discussions continued for approximately two months into the next academic year. In advance of final policy approval, the standards committee sponsored a pilot project that included 15 volunteers from the ranks of new and term-certain faculty to implement the new approach that we had proposed. No members of our group participated in the pilot project. The pilot included participants from all divisions in a variety of certificate, diploma, trades, and university studies programs. An early evaluation of the pilot was carried out by an outside consultant through focus groups with the participants. The positive results of that evaluation were reported to the Professional Standards Committee before it recommended final approval.

The consultant's report about the pilot project and the final policy document were presented to the faculty association. The association held a non-binding referendum on support for the new policy with slightly more than half of the faculty who voted supporting it. Since the proposal for the change in the tenure process was one of many changes in the policy, it is impossible to speculate what affect that segment of the policy had on the large negative sentiment expressed by the vote. Two other contentious issues had also been included in the policy, namely that all students in all classes would be asked to provide instructor feedback as opposed to the instructor-selected classes polled previously, and that full time tenured faculty would be required to provide an annual report to their Deans outlining their activities for the year. These changes received far more attention than the one that our group had proposed. The Professional Standards Committee (made up of five faculty members and two academic administrators) did not change their course of action as a result of the faculty association vote and the policy was recommended and approved as presented.

Our action research project had a major influence on the tenure process of the college. Through a combination of being well prepared by our action research activities and by recognizing an opportunity to influence change, the research group was able to successfully implement its action plan. Timing of the action taken by the group to coincide with other changes in the institution was an important factor in its success. The new tenure process was being tested in a college-wide demonstration project. The group's excitement and commitment to the proposed process for tenure was neither challenged nor greeted with enthusiasm in the discussions that they had with other faculty which led to some disappointment on the part of some group members. The significant change in the Chair role in faculty evaluation and the change in the first year of probation for new faculty seemed to be underestimated in those discussions. The new policy was being implemented and initial evaluation of the new tenure process provided encouragement to continue the project. The research group was convinced that they had a major effect on the college as a result of their work.

Discussion

I have assessed this action research study on the basis of its influence on the action research group members, its effect on the college, and its potential for continued application in a college environment. As the study progressed, the challenges of application of action research in the college workplace emerged including the establishment of a safe environment that permitted frank discussion of the college organizational culture, honest assessment of problematic practices, and authentic conversation that led to a deep understanding of group members' perspectives. Tensions regarding the time required for the day-to-day work of the Chair participants and the time required to adequately support the research group were reported by the group members. Other tensions involving group members' individual perspectives on the work of Chairs and their roles of supervision, leadership, management, mentorship, and peer evaluation were also uncovered. The recognition of these conflicts gave rise to a deeper understanding of the varying expectations that these Chairs experienced from their peers, the institution, and themselves. My role in the research group provided some institutional support for the group which was seen as an important requirement for further application of action research in our institution. The work of Bradbury and Reason (2006) can be used as a theoretical framework to organize this assessment. In their concluding chapter of *Handbook of Action Research*, they describe five issues in action research as points of choice and questions of quality. These five issues, written as questions are:

Is the action research:

- Explicit in developing a praxis of relational-participation?
- Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?
- Inclusive of a plurality of knowing?
  - Ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity?
  - Embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
  - Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
- Worthy of the term significant?
- Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure? (p. 350)

I have used these questions as a framework for the discussion of the action research component of the study and to evaluate its validity. Reference is also made to the work of Greenwood and Levin (2007) which provide further theoretical context in which to assess this study.

The Praxis of Relational-Participation

Long term commitment to the practice of action research likely rests on its democratic and participatory nature. Bradbury and Reason (2006) take the perspective that the question of validity in action research is related to relationship and the level and quality of participation in the outcomes. They suggest:

> …shifting the dialogue about validity from a concern with idealist questions in search of 'Truth' to concern for engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important. (p. 341)

From their perspective:

> [c]ooperative inquiry is thus informed with real attention to the issue of congruence between the process and cooperative spirit of the inquiry, such that appropriate participation and authority is made possible. (p. 346)

In addition, they conclude that large-scale efforts "…may really only qualify for the label 'action research' when all who are participating have an opportunity to be part of the planning" (p. 346). Greenwood and Levin (2007) support this view when they describe the participation component that they believe to be critical in the conduct of action research. They state:

> We believe in participation, placing a strong value on democracy and control over one's own life situations….Because these people together establish the AR agenda, generate the knowledge necessary to transform the situation, and put the results to work, AR is a participatory process in which everyone involved takes some responsibility. (p. 7)

In this research study, the participants expressed that they were involved as equal participants in planning the study, deciding on the research question, developing a shared understanding of the planning context, planning the strategy for action, and implementing the plan. Bradbury and Reason ask several questions which they suggest should be posed in assessing the quality of action research based on their relational-participation criterion. Because the study was designed to involve the researchers maximally, one dimension of this quality criterion is satisfied. Our group did not design a plan that would engage all those affected in full participation. For example, the Professional Standards Committee was only involved as the final proposal was presented to them. New faculty and department Chairs outside the research group policy were also not included in the research activities. Bradbury and Reason (2006) would judge the degree to which "...less powerful people are helped by their experience of participation in the inquiry..." (p. 347) as a measure of the quality of the study. If we were to consider the Chairs in the group as less powerful—and by their own assessment this would seem to be the case—then this quality assessment would be at least partially achieved. The least powerful—new faculty members—were not involved.

Reflexive Concern for Practical Outcomes

Action research, according to Bradbury and Reason (2006) does not arise from scientific theorizing and intellectual curiosity but from common people who wish to use practical knowledge for their own collective benefit. They state:

> This emerges from the notion that people with real material issues at stake (jobs, reputations, livelihoods) are willing to act on what has been learned in the course of their research. An important question to ask, therefore, is whether the research is 'validated' by participants' new ways of acting in light of the work? In the simplest sense people should be able to say 'that was useful—I am using what I learned! (p. 347)

My interpretation of this research study is that our group met this criterion for validity and quality very closely. The participants developed a deeper understanding of their roles as department Chairs, they explored the micropolitics of their working environment, and they used this knowledge to change their practices related to the tenure process within the institution. They clearly did use what they learned. In addition, there was strong evidence, particularly from Carol and Meghan, that they used the action research process in another key group as our study progressed. Both made several references to that project in our conversations. The participants also made reference to the applicability of action research to other change processes where more substantive changes were likely required, for example, changes in belief and practice. The participants suggested that they gained new appreciation for the value of conversation and the process of action research. While some expressed surprise that an action did take place and that the tenure process for the entire college had actually been changed through our actions, they all did have significant optimism as the project began that they could make a difference without yet knowing the problem that we would try to solve. Greenwood and Levin (2007) define the action component of action research by stating:

> AR is participatory because AR aims to alter the initial situation of the group, organization, or community in the direction of a more serf-managing, liberated, and sustainable state....Some use AR to create a kind of liberation through greater self-realization. Others emphasize more political meanings of liberation, and these vary among themselves regarding how strong a political liberation agenda they advocate. Still others believe that AR occurs in any kind of research activity in which there is participation by some members of the organization being studied. Although a few practitioners try to link AR and revolutionary praxis, by and large, AR practitioners are democratic reformers rather than revolutionaries. (p. 6)

Some research group members did not consider the conversation, deeper understanding and increased self-realization as part of the action in action research. This was "just talk" and of lesser consequence than an observable change in institutional practice. Since three of the department Chairs were going to continue on in their roles for the foreseeable future, the results did affect their jobs. Meghan was subsequently hired by the college as an expert to provide coaching to department Chairs in their new mentorship role. All the participants stated that they now had new knowledge that they could apply in their day-to-day activities in the college. They also suggested that they were interested in applying what they learned about the process of action research in the future. From my perspective, I became aware of some critical qualifiers related to the applicability of action research as a regular institutional practice including the importance of relinquishing control over the outcomes of the project, creating adequate time and space for authentic conversation, and building trusting relationships with equal participants in the research endeavour. My intention would be to apply this knowledge the next time that I attempt to use action research as a change process. All these results indicate that reflexive concern for practical outcomes was a component of this study.

Plurality of Knowing

The espoused commitment of a post-secondary institution to the creation of new knowledge relates directly to the application of action research in that setting. Greenwood and Levin (2007) describe the 'research' component of action research:

> We believe in research, in the power and value of knowledge, theories, models, methods, and analysis. We believe that AR is one of the most powerful ways to generate new research knowledge. (p. 7)

The college environment, if it were to be consistent with its commitment to learning and research, should provide a supportive environment in which to apply action research as an institutional practice. Greenwood and Levin (2007) share my concern with such an application when they state:

> In a higher education environment, AR is not an easy way to work, because disciplinary enrollments and boundaries are the tools used in academic competition and administrative command and control. (p. 8)

Certainly the environmental analysis conducted by the research group indicated a shared view that the college was bureaucratic in nature and that credentialism—a characteristic of academic competition—existed. That being said, the commitment to knowledge development through action research did seem to resonate with the research group and with those who received the proposal for change. Analysis using Bradbury and Reason's three sub-categories of plurality of knowing, namely conceptual-theoretical integrity, extending our ways of knowing, and methodological appropriateness provides more insight into the knowledge development in this study. I will describe each of these as they apply to this study starting with conceptual-theoretical integrity.

Conceptual-theoretical integrity. In the planning and in the analysis and description of this study, I have attempted to utilize theoretical constructs that help to order complex phenomena. Bradbury and Reason (2006) state:

> …efforts at theorizing [should] be anchored in people's experience. Theory is used to bring more order to complex phenomena, with a goal of parsimonious description so that it is also of use to the community of inquiry. It was Kurt Lewin who said that theory is practical, not that it *should* be practical, merely that it *is* practical! Indeed without theory, one's practice is impoverished. (p. 347)

In this study, theories of action research, conversation as a research method, micropolitics, and the Chair role have all been applied to both practice and analysis. Further, Bradbury and Reason (2006) suggest that:

> A well-written study can be used by fellow inquirers with similar concerns to 'see as if' and illuminate their own situations. This honours the notion of a community of inquiry among action researchers. (p. 347)

This dissertation is an attempt to carefully write a study that includes sufficient contextual data that can help to illuminate the practice of others in similar circumstances. Our group's knowledge represents only a hypothesis about reality and as Bradbury and Reason (2006) point out, "good interpretations are those that are more reasonable than others" (p. 347). Thus, there is a measure of conceptual-theoretical integrity involved in the communication of this work.

Extending our ways of knowing. The second category of plurality of knowing, according to Bradbury and Reason (2006) is the characteristic of action research in which the participants often do not feel constrained in their methods for disseminating their results. Our group summarized the findings of our work in the proposal document that was submitted to the Professional Standards Committee (Appendix D). They chose to appear in person before the committee and any other group that wished to engage in a conversation about the study and the proposal. Because conversation was very important in the communication of their findings, they expressed disappointment that they were not engaged in the type of conversation that would have provided more substantive conceptual exploration. The extensive analysis and academic rigour applied in this dissertation is a more traditional form of dissemination of research findings and interpretations. Plurality of knowing in this case can be seen as the knowing experience of the research group itself, the very brief summary contained in the written proposal, the conversations engaging various groups within the college, and finally in this dissertation.

Methodological appropriateness. In describing their third aspect of plurality of knowing, Bradbury and Reason (2006) suggest that:

> ...inquiry is placed at the centre of personal and small-group research practice. It might be seen as foundational steps towards building larger infrastructures based on inquiry. (p. 348)

In embarking on this study, I suggested that action research might become a more accepted form of inquiry that could be applied in the practice of administration at a college. In addition, some group members expressed their hope that this approach to participatory change could be applied on a larger scale throughout the institution. This supports the view of Bradbury and Reason (2006) that:

> [i]f we are animated by a worldview of participation and seek to have congruence between our theory of reality and our practice, then our selected methods must

> also be relational and be able to describe a relational worldview (Bradbury and Liechtenstein 2000). We imagine that they will provide a systematic way of engaging people on issues of importance, drawing on many ways of knowing in an iterative fashion. (p. 348)

The research group members in this study seemed motivated by this worldview of participation but always were careful to suggest that the participation must be authentic and not manipulated or contrived. They stated on many occasions that joint ownership of process and product was critical to authentic and sustainable change. The iterative and reflective nature of the discussions regarding the practice of Chairs in faculty evaluation, the action research process, and the effect of the study on the organization suggest congruence with this third aspect of plurality of knowing—methodological appropriateness. By applying theoretical frameworks to the analysis of this study, the aims of Bradbury and Reason are further satisfied in that a relationship has been built between the experiential knowledge constructed by the research group and the bodies of knowledge that have been built by others. Should the action research group choose to continue its work, this work would inform their continuing process thus creating another iteration of knowledge building.

Engaging in Significant Work

The fourth question in Bradbury and Reason's five criteria for quality assessment in action research is related to the issue of significance. They ask if the questions being posed by the research are worthy of attention and determined by the full participation of the action researchers. They cite the work contained in several other chapters in the same volume that illuminate three different approaches to this question. The approach most applicable to this study is related to the chapters written by Torbert (2001) and Marshall (2001). Bradbury and Reason (2006) point out that through

> ...increasing reflexive attention, asking questions about the relationship between practice and purpose, [Torbert and Marshall] illustrate ways in which we can bring ongoing consciousness to the fundamental question of whether or not we ought to be doing what we are doing at all. At the heart of both chapters is the issue of accessing self-inquiry that pushes us always to ask about the values we hold and the value of the work with which we engage. (p. 348)

In this study, there was a strong sense of this reflexive questioning as the Chairs in the group assessed relevance and value of their own practices in evaluating new faculty. They also questioned what an appropriate leadership role should be compared to their current practice. One of those conversations suggested that they considered their role in evaluation useless both to the college and to the faculty members being evaluated. They determined that such practices had to be changed in order to bring more meaning to their practice and more meaning to those being evaluated. This gave rise to the mentorship approach in the first year experience of new faculty. This inquiry by our research group involved the day-to-day work of department Chairs in the institution and was a significant departure from an emphasis on the routine practice of fulfilling the steps of a regimented process of evaluation. The transition to a developmental focus for the evaluation of new faculty including a newly mandated mentorship role for department Chairs is significant in an institution that had not anticipated changing any aspect of its existing tenure process.

Emergent Inquiry Towards Enduring Consequence

The last question of validity outlined by Bradbury and Reason (2006) involves the "long-term evolutionary, emergent form of inquiry" that characterizes action research. They cite the work of Peter Park (2001) stating that:

> ...in addition to creating objective knowledge of social conditions, action research also strengthens community ties, and heightens transformative potential through critical consciousness. The simultaneous pursuit of these three goals makes action research a holistic activity addressing key human social needs, which may be unique among social change activities. Seeing social change as a research activity forces us to think of community ties and critical awareness as forms of knowledge. (p. 349)

During this study, the participants stated that they had gained a new appreciation of the environment in which they worked. They had engaged in critical inquiry into the micropolitics of that environment and the roles that they played in it. While there was not consensus on the realities experienced by each of them, the group members felt that they were now better equipped to engage in other change processes as a result of their participation in this study. They viewed this critical awareness as a form of knowledge—knowledge that they were willing to share with others as evidenced by the proposal presented to the Professional Standards Committee.

The enduring nature of action research is explained by Bradbury and Reason (2006) based on the work of Marshall (2001) as follows:

> The integration of the three aspects of action research (first-, second- and third-person) suggests that sustaining the work of action research is often the outcome of a logic of structurated action in which the dyadic or small-group micro-engagement of people working on a project together convened around an area of mutual concern manifests in an ongoing new patterning of behaviours at a more

> macro-level. We may call the latter a new infrastructure in that it structures new patterns of behaviour even after the action researcher has left the scene. Thus new behaviours are created and can begin to alter institutional patterns of behaviour, albeit slowly. One may start off with, and build upon, small wins. (p. 349)

The work of our research group resulted in two new patterns of behaviour. In the first, the policy on tenure was changed which established a new possibility for relationship building, new opportunities for leadership on the part of department Chairs, and new opportunities for relational praxis. In the second, there are now six individuals in the institution who participated in action research who are interested in using the approach in their future practice. The latter has the potential for the "ongoing new patterning of behaviours at a more macro-level" as suggested by Bradbury and Reason.

Action Research as Routinized Practice

Throughout the research project, the research group reflected on institutional barriers and the establishment of principles for the application of action research as a routinized institutional practice. Some of the enabling factors suggested by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) are congruent with the comments of the research group namely: institutional commitment to participatory processes, focus on personal attitudinal change, adequate time for full participation, and the creation of vertical alliances. One such enabling factor was demonstrated by my participation in the research group which was seen as an important institutional commitment to the inquiry that we had undertaken. Group members suggested that my influence with other senior administrators would all but eliminate any potential barriers from that sector. In addition, by scheduling meetings during normal hours of work, I had inadvertently provided further institutional support for our activities. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) suggest that incorporation of participatory processes in organizational change is more than "...adding a new set of tools and methods to existing institutions, which themselves may be hierarchical, inflexible and non-participatory" (p. 79). They called for "...high-level participation champions who will support the process, who encourage middle managers to take risks and behave differently, who can interpret the new way of working for others" (p. 79). My participation exemplifies this enabling factor. The participation of the Chairs is consistent with the involvement of middle management in the process.

The focus in our study on attitudinal and behavioural issues and their relationship to proposed changes in institutional practice are consistent with the second enabling factor cited by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001). They suggest that simply focussing on a mechanistic application of participatory practices would not be sufficient to gain wide support of participatory action research in the institution. Changes in "personal values, ethics, and commitments by those who are using the tools…at all levels" (p. 79) would be necessary for institutionalization of participatory action research. The conversations that explored personal values and commitment in relation to group members' views of institutional values and commitment demonstrated how a participatory action research group could engage in such potential change activities. Also consistent with the views of research group members is Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) advice to take time and to go slow. They suggest that bureaucratic needs might

> …drive the process rather than allowing a slower more deliberate participatory process to take its course. Those programmes which have gone to scale most effectively, in fact, have done so horizontally—rather than vertically. That is, they have included processes of peer-to-peer sharing, of building demonstration projects which then spread to other areas, and of including time for learning, testing and continuous improvement in the process. (p. 79)

Our research group saw the time requirement as a major challenge associated with incorporating action research as a routine practice in the institution. They suggested that time was necessary to provide opportunity for reflection and the iterative processes of building and testing knowledge through lived experience. Institutional requirements for decision-making and efficiency were seen as a potential conflict with those time requirements.

The creation of vertical alliances and networks was recommended by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) when they stated that there is a "…need for new forms of trust and collaboration across levels of power" (p. 79). Our research group demonstrated such collaboration in its membership. Group members also made use of other network opportunities with their own supervisors and with the Professional Standards Committee which included both faculty and administration. Trust and collaboration were highly valued by group members as was evidenced by their comments regarding the rules of engagement and the trust that they invested in the group. Finally, the research group demonstrated concern over what they described as authentic or real participatory action research. This took the form of institutional recognition and support for the emergent nature of the research questions, the construction of knowledge, and the action plan for change. This corresponds to Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) call for the monitoring of quality and accountability of participatory methods. They state:

> This implies a new understanding of participatory research ethics—that goes beyond traditional ethical concerns regarding such things as confidentiality and protection of research subjects, to ask questions about who participated in and benefits from research processes, how information is used and by whom, and how the process transforms or supports power relations. (p. 80)

In our study, caution was expressed by group members that participatory action research could be used as a tool of manipulation by administrators who wished to give the appearance of participation only to quiet their opposition. Such co-optation would be seen as unethical according to Gaventa and Cornwall.

The membership in the research group was raised many times by group members suggesting in the beginning that they feared the group would be too homogeneous to support challenging conversation. Later, as the project developed, group members began to recognize the diversity within the group which is consistent with the sentiments expressed by Greenwood and Levin (2007):

> …even in the most homogeneous-appearing groups, there are wide differences in knowledge, interests, experience, and capabilities. We view these differences as a rich social resource that, when effectively mobilized, gives a group or an organization a much greater capacity to transform itself. We view democracy as an open system that should be able to welcome and make humane use of these differences. (p. 11)

The experiences, knowledge, and abilities within the research group were the resource that was mobilized to produce changes in institutional practice and in the individuals within the group.

Reflection on My Role in the Project

My interest in exploring action research as a tool for collaborative knowledge creation and institutional change stemmed from my concern that my academic institution seemed to lack some of the characteristics of learning organizations I outlined in my introduction. The development of distributed leadership capacity was also suggested as a critical component for organizations of the future and the very survival of academic institutions could be seen to hinge on these developments. In addition, our corporate, union-oriented, and bureaucratic institutional culture seemed to make such changes more difficult—particularly if they were suggested by a largely distrusted administration. Action research provided an opportunity for me to verify some of my perceptions of the institutional context of the study and to build my knowledge based on the shared knowledge of the participants in the study. I have reflected on my role in the group including my deliberate attempts to facilitate group process and to catalyze the actions taken by the group. To the extent possible, I tried to remain alert to the various subtle ways that I influenced the dialogue process, both intentional and unintentional. The researcher's role in action research is fraught with issues of ethics, control and knowledge negotiations, as I have discussed in other sections of this chapter. This was particularly so in this project where I held a formal role in the college, and entered the group dialogues as both an institutional insider and a (researching) outsider. So while I attempted to see and surface my own biases, and to allow the dialogues to emerge naturally from the participants' own interests and meanings, inevitably my influence on the project will have exceeded even my own awareness of it.

Initially, I attempted to make my call for volunteers (Appendix A) a clearly academic exercise by identifying myself as a student researcher with a vague agenda related to leadership and peer supervision. There was no administrative agenda and I was careful not to identify myself as an administrator in the call for participants. I included a list of potential benefits to participants with particular emphasis on the learning that could result from participation. At this early phase of the project I was clear on my expectation that the areas of inquiry and the plan for action would result from the work of the research group. When I met with potential participants for the first time, I reinforced these ideas in my initial presentation of the project. I briefly described the action research process at this initial meeting emphasizing the participatory nature of the process and the importance of a group generated agenda. My initial view of the research context and my research stance were known to the group members at this stage because I had sent them a copy of my research proposal prior to the meeting. I indicated that their final decision to participate and signature on the consent letter (Appendix B) would only be required prior to our first research group meeting to be held almost four months later. By making the academic nature of the exercise clear and by indicating that this was not a task being assigned by administration, I believe that group members began to recognize the potential for group ownership of the process. Since all but one of the members of the group had completed graduate studies, they conscientiously honoured the data and process requirements of the project related to my thesis. Two of them, in particular, often asked if I was getting the information I needed for my thesis. I appreciated their understanding and support of my progress in my studies.

Prior to the first group meeting, I required the members to sign their consent forms which likely confirmed their commitment to me and to the group to continue with the project. I was satisfied with their personal commitment much earlier because I had worked with all the volunteers prior to this project. I had already established significant trust relationships with each one of them at some point in the previous 15 years of my tenure in administrative positions. While the group members had not worked with each other to the same extent as they had worked with me, they all knew each other prior to the project. There was a climate of mutual respect entering into the project.

The level of personal interaction between me and each of the participants prior to the project was almost solely related to my work as a supervisor and leader in the institution. My style of management tended to include some personal interactions wherein information related to our personal lives was often shared informally. This would include information about our families, holiday plans, and other casual conversation topics. To my knowledge, there were no close friendships between any members of the group. As I listened to the meeting tapes and reread the transcripts, I realized that there was little exchange of personal information at the meetings that was not directly related to group members' work. Due to the significant time constraints of our busy schedules, there was a feeling that we should get to the purpose of the meeting quickly. This was also evident in the punctuality of the members at each meeting. I was careful to honour that time commitment by starting and ending our meetings on time and by following our agreed upon process of beginning each meeting reviewing the notes and interpretations of the previous meetings. Efficiency and high time-on-task are also consistent with the participants' daily roles as Chairs at the college.

As I facilitated the meetings, I made the recording as unobtrusive as possible. After the first meeting, there were no comments made about the recording indicating no serious constraint was placed on our interactions by that process. The meetings had no prior agenda. The topics that were considered grew from the review of the previous meeting's notes and from topics that group members wished to pursue. I let these conversations emerge from the group members. This proved an easy task since the group members became focused on pursuing particular avenues of inquiry in the areas of leadership, management, and institutional context. I tried to relate their views to their own practices as Chairs and to their roles in peer supervision by asking probing questions and by paraphrasing their comments adding some interpretive comments as a member of the group. I consistently framed my interpretive comments with questions to validate the interpretations. I also added my own experiential information to the conversations from my ten years of experience as a department Chair. This helped to place me in their context and to level my position relative to their experiences. I was not able to remove myself from the role of facilitator and note-taker. As the project progressed, group members seemed to feel more personal ownership as was indicated earlier.

On several occasions I found myself posing the question, "Can you think of something that we can do to make this better?" The group was quick to respond with actions that could be taken. As indicated earlier, all members of the group expected that the action in action research should be related to a tangible change in the organization and in their practices as Chairs. I did not feel that my introduction of these discussions represented an abrupt shift in the direction of the conversation. It seemed to flow naturally from the discussions in which we were engaged. I had not predicted the action that our group took. I had expected a more individual approach to the action plan where each member would undertake a particular activity and then report back to the group for debriefing and further action planning. Given my history as an administrator in a corporate and bureaucratic organization, I had to keep reminding myself that the knowledge development and plan development should emerge from the process. I had to repeatedly remind myself that the agenda was not mine and that I could not predict the timelines or the results of the project. Having studied the theory of action research and having experienced this process first hand, I now have a much better appreciation of the major cultural and attitudinal shifts required in both the organization and in individual managers in order to adopt action research as a routinized institutional process.

Conclusion

The five quality criteria suggested by Bradbury and Reason (2006) have provided a framework for the assessment of this action research study and its possible incorporation into the regular practice of a post-secondary institution. All group members felt that they had contributed equally, that their views were received respectfully and that there was a feeling of safety in the work that was accomplished. The group appeared to be satisfied that changes had resulted from the research in their own knowledge and attitudes, in their practice as department Chairs and in the institutional practices related to faculty evaluation and tenure. The college had received the change positively as evidenced through the approval of the new policy on faculty evaluation which included the proposal presented by our group. There emerged a new developmental emphasis in the evaluation system in addition to the summative forms of assessment still present in the policy. The research study provided sufficient information to indicate strong potential for successfully introducing participatory action research into the college environment. The congruence between the work of the research group, the knowledge that it generated and the theoretical context of Greenwood and Levin (2007), Bradbury and Reason (2006), and Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) strongly supports the potential for routinized application of participatory action research in the institutional setting of a college. Reflection on my own involvement in the project supported my understanding of the criteria outlined above and also provided me with insight into the continued application of the process in the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the efficacy of participatory action research as a process for the development of collaborative processes of peer supervision. Action research was used to assist a group of department Chairs in recognizing their roles in leadership and supervision and in collaboratively developing a peer supervision process that is authentic and useful. In addition, the action research process was tested for its potential as a catalyst for change that could be introduced by senior administrators in a higher education institution and by department Chairs in their own practices of leadership. The research method being tested also formed the source of the data for this inquiry. Three research questions that emerged from the participatory action research group demonstrate this two stranded approach to the research:

1. How can we collaboratively develop a supervision process that is more authentic and useful?
2. What does leadership mean in the role of a college Chair and how is leadership enacted in the process of supervision?
3. From the perspective of the participant researchers, what are the benefits and drawbacks of action research in developing and implementing new administrative processes?

Findings were reported in chapters four, five, and six in terms of the discovery of the participants' knowledge and knowledge development regarding institutional micropolitics, their roles as Chairs, and the applicability of action research as a routinized catalyst for organizational change. In this chapter I begin by summarizing the findings to draw together themes presented in previous chapters. Next, I discuss the implications of these findings for the theory of supervision and college leadership, the practice of supervision and college Chair leadership, and the theory and practice of action research. Areas for further research are described before I close the chapter with a discussion of the key findings of the project and its influence on my approach to leadership in the future.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study were organized in three broad categories: organizational micropolitics, the role of the department Chair, and the practice of action research in an institutional setting. The micropolitical analysis that naturally developed in the conversations of the research group indicated that such analysis was both suited to the college context of this study and to the action research process. As the interests, conflict, and power relationships in the institution were explored, the role of the department Chair emerged as an important source of personal conflict for the participants. The research group developed their understanding of the problems associated with peer supervision and the tenure process as they continued their inquiry into their roles and their relationships with their peers. Through the application of an action research process, initiated by a senior administrator, the research group was able to produce a change in the practice of the institution. This change provided a new developmental focus for the tenure process at the college and a new opportunity for the enactment of leadership in the role of Chair.

Micropolitical Analysis as a Framework for Context Analysis

The conversation that evolved during this research study gave rise to an analysis of the planning context that was consistent with many aspects of a micropolitical analysis as suggested by Morgan (2006) and consistent with its application in an educational setting as suggested by Ball (1987) and Chu (2006). The natural evolution of the research group's conversation into a micropolitical frame of reference suggests that it is ideally suited to this environment when the participants are well acquainted with the interests, conflicts, and power structures in an organization. The bureaucratic and managerial culture of the college provide an environment characterized by power differentials, loosely associated groups with divergent interests, and the inherent conflicts that arise from such circumstances. The research group explored the factors that they viewed as constraints to any change in the organization before they had explored the specific problems associated with peer supervision, leadership, and the tenure process. Those constraints included their perceptions of power in the institution as an instrument of conservatism. Faculty attitudes and the faculty association were seen as sources of institutional inertia.

Other issues of power seemed related to gender issues in the organization but this was not explicitly explored by the research group. The analysis of the conversations points to the potential for gender-based power issues associated with the role of Chair and the preferred ways of leading by women in that position. Without making these issues explicit, the research group found a way of facilitating their preferred ways of enacting leadership in their departments as we developed our action plan. Their political analysis of the organization pointed the way for the group to bring change to the organization by using their knowledge of its bureaucratic structure and by making their developed knowledge known to decision-makers and decision-influencers. Members of the group suggested that they had discovered "points of entry" where change could be introduced and fostered in the organization. As the group shared its understanding of the college environment, it developed a sense of confidence in moving forward with its action plan.

The description and discussion in Chapter Four: Micropolitics: Context and Strategy provides insight into the planning context for this action research study and as such provides information that allows readers to consider the applicability or adaptability of the approach used here in their own settings. It demonstrates that the planning context within a post-secondary institution that is based on a managerial culture and bureaucratic process can be analyzed successfully using the micropolitical frame of reference including interests, conflict, and power. Power relationships based on formal delegated authority, control of information, countercultures, personal power, knowledge of institutional processes and gender-related issues are all key in understanding the dynamics that influence change in such a college environment. These power relationships can influence the practice of department Chairs especially in the manner that they choose to manage the conflicting expectations related to management and leadership roles. Choices made by Chairs in response to participating in the analysis of the organization from this perspective can be a strong contributor to the development of reflexive practice for Chairs and in their approach to leadership in the organization.

Role of the Chair

The conversations that included the role of the department Chair were related to the general parameters that the group agreed to explore at the beginning of the project—supervision and leadership. Role ambiguity and the perception of conflicting expectations regarding these roles were highlighted in the discussion and pointed to the key sources of discomfort experienced by some members of the group. It was during this exploration that the diversity among group members began to emerge. One member of the group had already developed many strategies to rationalize the potential conflict in roles and was able to assist others in questioning and exploring their own positions. Comparison and contrast of values and experiences framed much of the conversation related to this topic.

The categorization of Chair roles into management and leadership roles was the group's first step in managing the information related to their multiple role expectations. The split divided management roles based on regulation-driven, routine functions such as evaluation of staff, faculty workload assignment, and the allocation of resources within the department from leadership roles related to long-term planning, influencing department climate, mentoring faculty, and setting department goals for development. This dichotomy helped the participants to make sense of their positions. This also helped them to compare their practices with each other highlighting differences and exploring their personal preferences as they proceeded. Role conflicts became apparent as the participants considered their positions relative to other members of faculty. While they recognized the power differential between themselves and their peers, they also recognized the importance of maintaining positive and collegial relationships with their peers. This suggested that the expectations placed on them for accountability and involvement in faculty evaluation could be at odds with institutional and personal expectations for leadership involving collaboration and development.

The participants in the study also tried to determine ways that they could enhance their power positions in an environment that provided little formal authority but still expected high levels of responsibility for maintaining quality standards and leadership in their departments. Personal credibility seemed to be one of the sources of such power and they discussed the ways that this could be enhanced. Credentials, training, and experience were the aspects of credibility that seemed to be most related to the roles of leadership and faculty supervision. They also suggested that evidence-based practice would support their credibility. This indicated that Chairs require more support through additional training for their leadership and management roles and through peer support as they practice their roles. It was apparent throughout the discussions regarding the Chair role that micropolitical analysis involving power relationships was a key component of the participants' inquiry.

The authenticity of peer feedback in faculty evaluation was questioned during the discussion of the roles that the Chairs play in that process. This gave rise to a key discussion regarding authenticity and usefulness of the existing faculty evaluation process. Group members questioned the veracity of the written reports that were submitted by peers—especially Chairs—following a single observation of a teaching/learning event and the usefulness of carefully worded and less than frank descriptions of what had occurred. They suggested that over time, Deans would grow to understand the "code" that was contained in such reports and be able to differentiate poor performance reports from good ones. Group members also viewed the existing process as repetitive and of little value in a formative sense. Their informal personal contacts with faculty members were seen to have more potential for authentic interaction and development-orientated conversation. The group focused its attention on the role of the Chair in the orientation and development of new faculty since they perceived that the tenure process provided both a risk and an opportunity for their enactment of leadership. The roles of mentor and supervisor seemed to be reconcilable as the participants explored ways to make the process both useful and authentic.

Action Research and Institutional Change

The focus of this research study was on the collaborative development of an authentic and useful supervision process, the leadership role that Chairs could play in that process, and the utility of action research as a process to enact change. The data from the study served a dual purpose in illuminating both product and process. The third area of inquiry—the efficacy of action research as a routinized administrative practice in an institution—provided insight into the complexities associated with the incorporation of collaborative processes into the everyday functioning of an institution.

Research group members reported that they had gained more appreciation of the action research methodology and its applicability to other institutional situations at our college. They were enthusiastic in their support of the collaborative nature of the process stating many times that they were impressed by the emergent nature of the problems and action plan. Various aspects of the process were valued differently by each individual but there was general agreement that all were important. These included: demonstrated institutional support for the project, trust among group members, agreement for confidentiality, respectful conduct of conversations, loose time constraints, no prescribed agenda, and no prescribed timeline. Equality of participation was viewed as critical. My initial concern was that my involvement would somehow constrain the participation of the other members due to perceived power differentials and formal authority structure. This seemed not to figure prominently in the conduct of this project. By the end of the project, group members felt that they had ownership of the project and its results. Since the project became subsumed in a larger institutional project, one group member in particular felt that she had given up this ownership in the final stages of the institutionalization of the change. I believe that this is an artefact of the premature ending of the project. Had our group committed itself to the next iterative cycles of continuing action research, this sense of loss might not have been felt. The other members of the group did not express this frustration.

The success of the project and its validity as evaluated using the Bradbury and Reason (2006) criteria suggest that there is a place for participatory action research in an institutional setting such as a community college. While the dominant managerial and bureaucratic culture of the institution would tend to support more efficient approaches to change, the issue of effectiveness remains an important criterion for the selection of change processes. Organizational balance between efficiency and effectiveness is, in my experience, a constant concern for administrators. Time considerations and unpredictable outcomes are two aspects of truly participatory and collaborative processes that are often associated with inefficiency. The inefficiency of forcing ineffective changes is, however, often not considered as few administrators take the time to reflect on their own practices. Through this study, our research group has demonstrated that action research can create an environment that enhances reflective practice of management and leadership. It can create an institutional space in which this reflexivity is both sanctioned and encouraged.

This action research project resulted in a new tenure process for our college. The features of the process involve a three year tenure procedure that features a first year of exploration, goal setting, and mentorship. This developmental focus includes the formalization of a mentorship relationship between the department Chair and the new faculty member that evolves over the three-year probationary period from a formative to a summative form of evaluation. The participants in the study were able to use the action research process to explore their role of Chair in such processes, to elaborate the difficulties that they encountered with the current system of tenure, and to share their observations of the difficulties experienced by others. This deepened understanding provided the knowledge that helped the participants to suggest a more meaningful and authentic approach that better suited their personal preferences for enacting leadership. The process also developed the knowledge that gave rise to a successful strategy for implementing the plan.

The exploration of the participants' practices in the Chair role became pivotal in the development of knowledge that led to the clarification of issues, deeper understanding of the planning context, and structuring an approach that would change a major practice within the institution. The structured approach to inquiry and knowledge construction afforded by participatory action research provided an opportunity for reflection and analysis for the Chairs in the research group. Micropolitical analysis was especially useful in the exploration of the potentially conflicting expectations placed on Chairs by institutional emphasis on accountability and, at the same time, expectations of developing strong interpersonal relationships with peers. The analysis of the context, the exploration of the understandings of the individuals in the group related to their roles as Chairs, the identification of problems in the current tenure process, and the emergence of a preferred way of managing the issues involved were intertwined in the authentic conversations that characterized the action research process in this project.

Implications of the Study

In general, the study demonstrated the application of a research methodology to the practice of administration. It provided strong indications that action research can be utilized by senior administrators to catalyze change and promote distribution and development of leadership in an institutional setting. In this section I describe how the findings of this study impact the application of theory in the areas of supervision and college leadership, the practice of supervision by college Chairs, and the practice of action research in an institutional setting such as a college.

Micropolitics in the College Setting

This study demonstrates the applicability and utility of micropolitical analysis of post-secondary educational organizations. The exploration of interests, conflict, and power provides insight into the planning context and gives rise to more clear recognition of issues that influence the practices of the participants in the study. It also provides a framework for the construction of knowledge based on the experiences of the participants that led to a successful implementation of an action plan. The study also suggests that the application of such a framework within the broader context of an action research methodology can help to enhance the validity of the research by attending to the conceptual-theoretical component of action research as suggested by Bradbury and Reason (2006). While there are many analytical frames that could be applied to the college organization in which I work, the micropolitical frame seemed especially well suited to this particular exploration because it involved power relationships and conflicting expectations placed on the Chairs as a result of competing interests. For example, the expectations related to efficiency and accountability seemed to be in conflict with leadership expectations of relationship building and collaboration within academic departments. The personal interests of their peers and the interests of the faculty association were also explored by the Chairs. This resulted in the development of approaches to practice that would address the expectations of the institution, faculty members, and the Chairs.

Having adopted the micropolitical framework for my analysis of this project, I now realize that a more explicit application of this theoretical construct might have been beneficial to the group in the context analysis phase of our project. The natural evolution of this analysis without formally introducing it suggests to me that the micropolitical framework offers particular insights to the college environment when change is being proposed at an institutional level and when the issues raised are related to power differentials. The managerial and bureaucratic nature of the institution provided fertile ground for political activity and political analysis. In his book, *The Department Chair Primer*, Chu (2006) indicates that skilful Chairs are constantly analyzing their environment using this political frame of reference. This environmental scanning is enhanced considerably through the use of conversation with other Chairs where they can share their perspectives, their experiences, and their knowledge in order to confirm, challenge, or complement their own knowledge. This study suggests that such group development of political knowledge can affect individuals' practices of some aspects of the Chair role as well as the practices of an institution. Given the competitive and political environment of post-secondary institutions, the application of such an analysis in a group of Chairs could be quite challenging in that sharing knowledge could reduce one's competitive advantage. One source of power as described by Morgan (2006) is knowledge and the control over it. Approaching such an analysis in the context of action research, however, can be a way of mitigating the trust issues associated with sharing knowledge. It may be a way of channelling competitive motivations into improvement of the organization in its competition with the outside world as opposed to internal competition for resources.

This study also demonstrated the micropolitics associated with peer evaluation and the induction of new faculty into the college environment. Power differentials provide a key source of conflict and ambiguity in the practice of department Chairs but can also provide barriers to authentic and useful supervision practices. The Chairs in this study were provided with a rare opportunity to reflect on these issues and to propose ways that our institution could overcome some of these barriers. For some members of the group, the recognition of the power differential between Chairs and faculty was the first step in moving toward an acceptance of a leadership role that was more appropriate for them personally and potentially more useful for those being evaluated and supervised. The conversations that explored the concepts of power, interests, and conflict led to deeper understanding of the participants' relationships to their peers, the institution, and new faculty.

Role of the Chair

This study confirms the descriptions found in the literature concerning the role of the department Chair in colleges and universities. It also confirms the significant reluctance of many Chairs to become involved in evaluating peers and to contribute to decisions that affect the promotion, development, and tenure of faculty. This study demonstrates how the role ambiguity of Chairs and the conflicting expectations of faculty and the institution affect the practice of Chairs in a very practical way. The conversations that I analyzed and reported are tangible demonstrations of how individuals have been impacted by this environment and how such ambiguity and conflict may have contributed to supervisory practices that were seen as inauthentic and not useful. A key issue that arose was the diverse nature of Chair roles that included management and leadership functions many of which seemed to have conflicting motivations. Efficiency and accountability characterized the management role functions that the Chairs in this study seemed least interested in while development and relationship building were the leadership functions that most interested them. By reflecting on their own practices in the Chair role, the participants were able to situate themselves in the organization and to recognize how they could meet the institutional expectations for accountability while enacting leadership through mentorship with a developmental focus for new faculty.

The conversations of the group implied the lack of training and orientation that Chairs receive when they move from their faculty positions into the Chair role. This has been suggested by many authors but was especially highlighted by Hecht et al. (1999). The Chairs in this study suggested that credibility was a source of power and their knowledge, credentials, and experience were all mentioned as contributors to that credibility. Collaborative approaches to institutional change such as the one demonstrated by this project provide an opportunity for Chairs to increase their knowledge and explore ways that they can develop their skills to better meet the demands of their diverse roles. It also suggests that a training program for new Chairs would benefit from the kinds of conversation and analysis that characterized this study. The depth of understanding achieved by group members and the practical application of their constructed knowledge served to increase their confidence in moving forward with their implementation of the action plan. This would likely be a strong contributor to credibility in their roles and therefore a mechanism to enact leadership in their own departments as well as the whole organization.

The opportunity for Chairs to sort through the various conflicting roles and the ambiguity associated with the expectations of the different constituencies of the college can provide Chairs with additional personal power that can be used to meet their responsibilities in an environment where they are not provided with many formal avenues of authority. They also have to balance their maintenance of strong interpersonal relationships—key in their accomplishment of their roles—with the requirements for quality control and efficiency. Personal exploration of the concepts, expectations, and preferences can help to achieve the balance that effective Chairs achieve over time. Group projects based on conversation and analysis of the planning context as demonstrated here are an avenue for that exploration that can provide an effective way of helping Chairs to develop. A similar approach to development through collaborative, reflective practice is suggested by McGill and Brockbank (2004) in action learning. They provide a model for action learning that combines conversation with reflective practice through group interaction. This differs from action research in that the aim is professional development through deep analysis of the practices of the participants and the conversations that build knowledge to improve the practice of the individuals. Action research, as in this study, aims to solve an organizational problem through the joint action of the group. The professional development of the individuals and their change in practice through the development of knowledge is a positive result of this activity.

The enactment of leadership by Chairs in the process of supervision was seen by the group to center on the development of a mentorship relationship with new faculty. In this case, leadership would take advantage of the power differential already existing between new faculty and the Chair providing an opportunity to set an agenda of development and formative assessment. Supervision would take on a developmental focus helping new faculty to develop their skills in and through reflective practice. The increased awareness of the new faculty members' skills and potential for development was proposed as a way of providing increased confidence in making judgements about the performance of these new faculty members. This combination of formative and summative assessment, relationship building and supervision, development and accountability seems to bring a needed balance to the ambiguity suggested by these paired demands.

Action Research

The theory of participatory action research suggests significant promise for the exploration of practice and for the democratic involvement of people in the influencing the conditions within their organizations and communities. This study was a demonstration of such an application in an institutional setting that documents the effect that the process had on the participants and their organization. Through participatory action research, the practices of the Chairs were explored as were the practices involving peer supervision and induction of new faculty in the college. The participants indicated that the experience of action research provided a deeper understanding of the process itself, suggesting that a true appreciation of its value to an organization is substantially increased through direct participation. An effective way to encourage the use of action research as an administrative practice might be to apply the methodology and to incorporate reflection on the process itself as a focus of conversation. Such constructed knowledge would provide the participants with an increased sense of the efficacy of participatory action research in their own practice.

Collaborative approaches to organizational change and the solution of institutional problems can be applied in institutional settings that are characterized as managerial and bureaucratic and can be initiated by senior administrators. This study demonstrates a successful application of the process in that a group of Chairs and a senior administrator collaboratively developed a supervision process that is authentic and useful. It also helped the Chairs to explore their leadership roles related to supervision and provided the group with the knowledge required to successfully implement their plan. The following is a summary of the conditions that contributed to the success of the project and the cautions that were expressed by the participants as they speculated on continued application of action research within the institution.

Time. Action research takes time. As we move up the hierarchy of a bureaucratic organization, time becomes more highly structured and less discretionary. The time required to engage in the authentic conversations recommended by Feldman (1999) where he suggests that there should be no time limit imposed on such conversation is less possible for senior or middle administrators. The value of this time consideration was discussed by the research group members in this study. Time between the conversations was used to validate and gather further information from the lived and reflective experience of the participants and proved to be important in building knowledge in the group. This also suggests that an action research process would, of necessity, require considerable time to complete. For senior administrators and Chairs who typically report serious time constraints, this would normally not be a preferred choice for relatively routine administrative tasks. The participants in this study also suggested that the lack of deadlines attached to the project was somewhat liberating and provided space for the emergence of the plan and the knowledge to support it. Again, institutional constraints would often interfere with such an approach since planning is often carried out in clearly defined cycles with deadlines for budget submissions and for accountability reports. A serious challenge is for administrators to create a timeline that is permissive of variation and unpredictability. The nature of the project would have some bearing on the ability to provide such latitude. In some cases, the benefits of such a project are largely found in the process and not so much in the product. For example, when seeking a more profound and lasting change in the culture of an organization, the changes in the members of the research team would be just as important as the resulting implementation of the plan.

Unpredictable outcomes. Pointed out several times during this study by various members of the group, the authenticity of the process would be crucial to its success. That is, the institution would have to be committed to whatever the action research team produced. Their ability to act would have to be almost unquestioned. As a senior administrator, I would have to qualify this unconditional support by suggesting that the action taken by the group would have to be consistent with the values and essential mission of the organization. By suggesting this at the outset, the action research group would be able to consider such constraints as they developed their plan. It is very difficult for administrators in a managerial culture to relinquish control of outcomes and timelines—especially if their jobs, and in some cases salaries—depend on the outcomes of such activities. This is even more difficult in the current climate of increasing calls for public accountability and increasing efficiency. This competitive and managerial environment is less likely to support action research groups since individual accountability is difficult to measure and evaluate in such an activity. The importance of proposing change that is a good fit for the people involved in the change and the importance of strong support from the organization engaged in the change process have to be emphasized in trying to incorporate collaborative approaches such as participative action research. Administrators at all levels who have experienced the process of imposed change where there was significant resistance might be interested in experimenting with new approaches.

Reflective practice. Those individuals involved in administration, whether it be part-time such as in the Chair role or full time, rarely have opportunity to reflect on their practice of administration. One important feature of action research is its structured approach to the examination of the planning context and the practice of the participants. In this study, the Chairs had opportunity to reflect on the aspects of their practice related to faculty evaluation and supervision. I had the opportunity to reflect on the process of helping Chairs to move more successfully into their positions and to become more effective in balancing their conflicting role expectations. Because the members of this action research group were predisposed to reflective practice in teaching, it is interesting that this same approach did not apply to all the members of the group regarding their practice as Chairs. The conversations in the project gave rise to new insights in their practice as Chairs and provided new strategies for balancing the ambiguous nature of the expectations placed on them as Chairs. Through a more routine application of collaborative approaches like action research, opportunities for such reflection would be created. The benefits of such opportunities might include improved practice, greater awareness of the environment leading to more successful applications, and gaining the support of others in similar positions.

Knowledge creation and application. As pointed out in Chapter One, contemporary organizations are being challenged to create leadership capacity in the management of knowledge and the workers who generate knowledge. Action research is a mechanism that provides the forum for sharing with each other the knowledge that members of the organization possess and to build new knowledge generated from the structured conversations within such a project. The action in action research is evident in the application of that knowledge. In this project, the action could be identified on several levels. The first was the day-to-day application of the knowledge gained by the participants as they used their new insights to interpret their environment and act on those new insights. The participants in this study indicated that they were doing that in the time between our group meetings. They also brought new knowledge from that application back to the group in an iterative process that continued to build the knowledge of the group. Another level of action was found in the conversations themselves. The engagement in the conversation was an action directly related to the construction of knowledge. This knowledge was shared with the members of the group and reiterated through the review of the previous meeting. A third level of action involved the creation of the proposal for change in the tenure process of the college. This action provided an opportunity for the group to categorize and refine the knowledge that it had created through discussion. The fourth level of action was in the sharing of the knowledge with decision-makers in the college in an effort to cause change in the institutional practices related to tenure. This action gave rise to an increased awareness outside the research group of some of the problems associated with current practices and a potential for mitigating some of those problems. Action continues as the new practices are being implemented throughout the institution. The reflective process established by the research group is continuing to have influence on the organization with the engagement of a consultant to evaluate the outcomes of the new processes. This knowledge will be developed and shared throughout the institution. Knowledge development and application is one of the key benefits of the incorporation of action research into the routine functions of the institution.

Significant work. As was pointed out earlier, one criterion for the establishment of the validity of action research has to do with the significance of the work (Bradbury & Reason, 2006). Significance includes questions that relate to inquiring into practice related to purpose. The application of action research should be reserved for questions that ask participants to relate what they do to the values they hold and the value of their work. Bradbury and Reason also suggest that the research should be worthy of attention and that this determination is made with full involvement of the participants. This aspect of validity is a key consideration when choosing to approach an issue or problem using action research. The routine application of the process for any administrative action that requires institutional change would likely not be appropriate unless it can involve the action researchers in the determination of the research question—at least the specifics of the question—and in connecting their practices and their values to the conversations. The potential for lasting change that requires deep exploration of values, practices, and participant involvement would be some of the criteria that would support choosing such an approach.

Enabling factors. The enabling factors described by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) provide theoretical aspects of organizations that would promote widespread application of collaborative processes. In this study, some of these enabling factors were demonstrated and provided support for the success of the project. My participation as a senior administrator at the college demonstrated participation at a high level in the organization signalling that there was importance attached to the project and that there was institutional support for it. This was pointed out by the members of the research group as they reflected on our process. I became one of the "high-level champions" described by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) encouraging middle-managers such as the Chairs to become involved in participatory approaches. Another enabling factor was the concentration of the project on attitudes and behaviours that had significance relative to the organization. The success of the project supports the contention of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) that this aspect of action research must be maintained and promoted to counteract a bureaucratic tendency to attach rules and checklists to routinized processes. This suggests a significant condition that would have to be placed on the incorporation of such processes on a regular basis. The tendency to form regulations around action research would make the process another meaningless administrative exercise.

Time as an enabling factor was already described. It should be noted that this project did not have a time frame attached to it. In fact, the time required by the project required an extension of my timelines for the writing of this thesis. The timing of the project was a factor in its success. While not planned, the proposed solution and the policy development cycle of the college coincided to produce a fortunate set of circumstances that gave rise to a larger project than had initially been considered. The opportunity was recognized by the research group as a result of their exploration of the planning context and the knowledge that they possessed regarding change processes in the institution. This aspect of action research should be emphasized in that the inquiry into the issues and related context can prepare participants to recognize the importance of the events around them. Pattern recognition and creative problem-solving are enhanced through such preparation. This also supports my view that organizations can be more nimble and innovative if they have developed and shared the knowledge of both their practices and their environment.

Vertical alliances and networks were suggested by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) as enabling factors that would help to create trust and the ability to collaborate between levels of power. This research study was also an exploration of ways to distribute and develop leadership capacity in an organization where leadership was largely centralized along with the control and authority functions of the organization. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) suggest the application of vertical alliances and networks in the macro application of action research as a way for communities to impact global change. I would suggest that this same approach is important at the micro level of application within organizations—especially those with hierarchical and managerial structures and cultures. The participants in this project pointed out the importance of my participation in the group from the perspective of a high level of commitment and institutional sanction but they also spoke of the trust that existed within the group. In this particular case, trust was likely a pre-existing condition. It only had to be gently reaffirmed in the early phases of the project. If this pre-existing level of trust had not been present, more time and attention would have been required throughout the project in building and maintaining trust among the group members.

Further Research

As I analyzed the data collected in this study, there were many questions raised that could not be fully addressed. These questions suggest avenues for further research that might involve future action research projects but could also be addressed through other research methodologies. First among these would be the continuation of this study through another cycle of action research. Even without the constraints placed on the study by my position as a graduate student, the project would likely have encountered other serious limiting factors related to membership on the research group and the length of time required to complete at least one cycle of the three-year tenure process. One member of the group retired the year after the study and two have returned to faculty positions that include leadership roles other than Chair positions.

Supervision, Leadership, and Chairs

As a result of the role changes experienced by the original group members, a new research group would have to be established in order to continue this study. Hopefully one or two individuals from the original group would participate in order to bring forward the knowledge gained from the first group. I am interested in pursuing the research study through at least one more iteration of the observing, reflecting, re-planning, and implementation phases. Since the college is committed to evaluating the new tenure approach through the engagement of an external consultant using focus group and interview techniques, there would be a ready source of data for an action research group to begin its work. All but one of the original group members have expressed interest in continuing to meet occasionally to discuss the progress of the implementation of the new tenure process. While the makeup of the group would be suitable for some research questions that might arise, I would be interested in working with a group of Chairs that were currently engaged in the mentorship role within the new tenure process in order to inquire into their perceptions of leadership and supervision and their observations of the effect the new process had on new faculty. As in this study, the precise nature of the research questions would have to arise from the research group.

Other Action Research Applications

In order to show the long term effects on leadership capacity in the organization, it would be necessary to apply action research in a number of different settings throughout the organization. Since one of the indications of this study was the importance of experiential learning relative to the action research process, it would be interesting to recruit more senior-level champions by having them participate in their own action research group. The challenge would be to convince them at the outset that their time would be effectively applied to such a project. Another avenue to explore would be the consideration of the enabling factor suggested by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) that indicated vertical alliances and networks as a mechanism for adoption of participatory methods on a large scale. I am interested in pursuing an action research project that expands the vertical nature of the research group beyond the two levels that were experienced in this study. Participation by four or more levels of a hierarchical organization would likely pose some interesting challenges—particularly in areas related to the establishment of trust and the frank, open discussion of the micropolitics of the organization. There are a multitude of issues and areas for concern in a bureaucratic organization that could form the basis for an action research study. For example, in our college, organizational communication systems seem to be a serious challenge that affects all levels of the organization which could form an area of inquiry.

Power Relationships Within the Faculty Association

As the action research group explored their relationship to some of the power structures in the organization, the issues related to feelings of powerlessness within their own faculty association are worthy of further exploration. It would be interesting to study the power dynamics within the faculty association itself and to study the relationships between that association and its organizational environment. Some members of our research group described their personal interactions with other faculty and their formal association which could form an initial position for such research. The most significant issue raised in this study was the conservative nature of faculty generally and of their association specifically. This could be tested in a number of ways including discourse analysis—a study of faculty association documents, minutes of meetings, transcripts of meetings; through interviews and surveys; or through participatory research methods such as action research.

Gender-related Organizational Issues

Indications of gender-related issues such as the conflict between the preferred leadership styles of women in a male-oriented organization and the expectations placed on them by their peers and the institution arose during the conversations. These issues seemed to be related to the gendered nature of the organization itself and to the accommodations that individuals have to make in order to apply more feminine approaches to their interactions within the organization. Drawing on the various feminist traditions of research, the extent of the impact on individuals in such an organization could be studied that would tend to confirm or counter the theories related to the deep masculine bias associated with contemporary western organizations. The extent that this is evident in institutions of higher learning would be an interesting contribution to the literature in this area (Ball, 2003; Krefting, 2003; Morley, 1999; Reay & Ball, 2000; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

Role and Identity

An important subtext that became evident in discussions related to the Chair role was the interplay of personal identity, role, role expectations, and practices consistent with both role and identity. The extent to which role and identity are related or mutually exclusive and the extent to which individuals in leadership roles can differentiate role from identity would be an interesting avenue for further research.

Introduction to the Role of Chair

During the study, research group members suggested that Chairs might require better training and orientation to the role. As they explored their involvement with leadership and management skills, group members recognized that such exploration was valuable to their own practice in the roles of the Chair. In addition, the new, formalized role of mentor to new faculty might require additional skills that were not apparent in many Chairs in the organization. At one point in this study, group members agreed that part of the credibility of the Chair rests with successful experience as a faculty member. This suggests that the transition process will likely be an important feature of the position in the future just as it has in the past. The literature in the area speaks strongly of the problems associated with this transition (Buller, 2006; Chu, 2006; Gmelch, 2004; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Hecht et al., 1999; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005) . An action research inquiry into producing a better way to move from faculty to Chair and back again would be of significant benefit to the individuals involved in the process. Hecht et al. (1999) provide an extensive list of the difficult transitions that are expected of Chairs but there is little in the way of practical suggestions for overcoming the issues related to the transition and for institutionalizing the approach. Chu (2006) and Buller (2006) provide 'how-to' manuals that contribute to the orientation and training of new Chairs but they do not address the issues of how Chairs can explore their particular practice and their own institutional micropolitics. Two methods currently applied include mentorship programs and formal workshop/orientation sessions. An action research project might find more creative approaches that would help those involved to explore their own approaches to the concepts of leadership and management and propose alternative approaches at an institutional level that would make the process more responsive to the attitudes and personal values of the participants.

Conclusion

The development of leadership capacity in community colleges was the primary focus of this action research study. As community colleges in Alberta, Canada were established, institutions based on corporate, managerial structures arose creating environments characterized by hierarchy, formal and centralized power structures, and traditional union/management relationships. This gave rise to leadership approaches based more on business models than on the traditional academic models associated with universities and four-year colleges. The literature concerning organizational leadership suggests that organizations of the future will have to be characterized by more distributed forms of leadership that are concerned with knowledge management and knowledge development. The learning organization has been identified as a potential model for this change. This study brought together a group of academic department Chairs with a senior administrator to explore how leadership, supervision, and the position of Chair interact to produce increased leadership capacity in our organization. As the group discussed our college culture and its micropolitics, a picture emerged that identified the issues and problems associated with part of their role of Chairs. The action research group engaged in conversations that were characterized by authentic and open discussion of their personal experiences, observations of their environment, and motivations for practice. From this emerged a specific set of problems that they felt had to be addressed and an action plan that was implemented across the college.

As the action research group explored the culture of the institution, they shared their personal experiences and reflected on how their interactions with the organization shaped their practice as Chairs and as faculty members. The organization was characterized as hierarchical, managerial, and bureaucratic. Power relationships were explored at the organizational level through discussions about the interests of faculty and their association, the hierarchical structure of the college and the power of the President, and the power associated with bureaucratic structures and the groups that possessed formally delegated power. The power of the Chair was discovered to be more related to personal power rather than to delegated, formal power. Group members described the importance of academic credentials, experience, and credibility as sources of this personal power. From this, group members developed a greater sense of their ability to enact change in the organization and to provide leadership in their own environments. I learned that this micropolitical analysis would be an excellent approach to suggest in other participatory processes that I might engage in as an administrator at the college.

Collaboratively, the action research group worked to develop a supervision process that would be authentic and useful. The group concentrated on the process of induction of new faculty into the college through the tenure process. They developed a process that involves a formalized mentorship relationship between the Chair and the new faculty member for the first year of the probationary period. This would be concluded with the new faculty member drafting a developmental plan for the second year and the Chair providing a report describing the mentorship year. The new model features a more intense interaction between new faculty members and the Chair which should be less threatening. That is, the Chair would provide no summative evaluative commentary in the first year but instead would mentor new faculty in developing goals. Thus, Chairs gain more knowledge about new faculty and can provide leadership at a time when new faculty might be most open to it. The collegial relationships built through this process also may ease the move to the Chair's more evaluative role in the second year. The new model features the development of interpersonal relationships and a new focus on the professional development of the new faculty member. It also provides an opportunity to structure the leadership role of the Chair and move the focus of a managerial function of supervision to a leadership function of development.

Role conflicts and ambiguity associated with the position of department Chair were shown to have direct influence on their everyday practice. The critical finding here was an indication that Chairs should be provided with opportunities to explore their own relationship to the organization, to their perceptions of leadership and supervision, and their skills in management and relationships. Diverse expectations placed on Chairs from their peers, the institution, and themselves should be explored and Chairs should be provided with strategies that they could adapt in balancing these often conflicting expectations.

The study demonstrated that action research can be applied effectively to an institution that is characterized as managerial and bureaucratic. It can also be accomplished through the facilitation of a senior administrator in collaboration with group members from lower hierarchical positions. As I pursue continued application of this methodology to my practice of administration, I need to consider a number of enabling factors in order to maintain validity and authenticity in the process. The institution should explicitly sanction the approach whenever it is used. This will require that more senior administrators will become aware of the process and hopefully engage in an action research project to fully appreciate its value and efficacy. Members of action research projects should be assured that their efforts will be supported and that the outcomes of their efforts will have real influence on the organization. I learned from the participants in this research group that the research questions, the exploration of the planning context, and the action plan cannot be pre-scripted by the facilitator or by those with formal authority in the organization. True leadership capacity development requires that those in authority trust that the work of the action research group is thorough and the results appropriate for the organization. Time must be provided for such work to be accomplished. Action research may, therefore not be appropriate for every participatory decision-making activity. Other approaches would be necessary if there were short and specified timelines and if the range of options was highly restricted by external factors. The processes of reflection, conversation, and knowledge construction seem not to correspond well to set timetables or to highly structured agendas.

Conducting research within one's own organization poses challenges that are often not found in the external facilitation of participatory action research described in much of the literature. Risks are related to the culture of the organization—its openness to critique and its ability to engage in authentic conversation. The support of senior administrators to champion the cause of participation and democratic organizational behaviour is critical to the success of such projects. In this study, the academic rigour associated with the construction of this thesis, the conversations with my supervisor, and the review of my supervisory committee brought an additional source of validity to the interpretation of the data. Such insight would not exist in the routinized application of action research in an institutional setting. An ability to check assumptions and to audit the development of the arguments within the action research group with an external person or group would be beneficial. This is especially applicable when the group members—including the facilitator—are internal to the organization.

Having completed this first segment of the action research cycle, I feel confident in suggesting that the initiator of such a research project will likely not be able to fully integrate into the research group as a co-participant or a co-researcher. Had the project arisen during conversation, there would be more possibility of this occurring. In subsequent participatory action research projects, I will likely embrace more fully the role of facilitator and likely encourage the group to more critical levels of analysis. In this research project, for example, it might have been possible to explore the gender-related issues that became apparent or explore more deeply the role/identity conflicts that arose. By being more accepting of the role of facilitator, I would have carried out more in-depth analysis of the conversations as they occurred perhaps offering theoretical frameworks that the group could use to further deepen their understandings and the conversations evolved. Introducing the literature of post-structuralists, for example, might encourage a group of academics to question their basic assumptions of themselves and the organization in which they work without directing the conversation toward a specific outcome. That the group was ready for such discourse was evident in exchanges such as the one regarding the difference between 'shared leadership' and 'distributed leadership'. This had to do with the relationship of the participants to their organization, to the hierarchy of the organization, and their identity/role conflicts. Because this was not explored from a critical perspective, the distinction was never resolved. With a post-structuralist perspective, there is more possibility of a more aggressive approach to distribution of leadership. In this study, the distribution of leadership was restricted to the personal understanding of the participants and their understanding of how to enact leadership within a pre-existing framework through subtle change in practice. The risk of clearly assuming the role of facilitator, however, brings with it increased risk of directing or manipulating the outcome of the project. As was pointed out by the participants in this study, such manipulation would result in loss of credibility and erosion of the relationships between levels of hierarchy.

Finally, I learned from this project that I can achieve considerable satisfaction from the work of a group in which I participated and from the relationships that developed over the course of the project. I felt confident as our research group's proposal went forward that it was both appropriate and possible given our exploration of the planning context and the reflections on the practices of the participants. It was also satisfying to realize that the participants in the project had the opportunity to reflect on their own practices in their roles as Chairs and that this had lasting value in helping them to recognize their own relationships to the institution and their positions in it. Continued application of action research suggests to me a significant opportunity to shift the culture of an institution like the one in which this study took place. Participatory action research provides an avenue for sharing leadership and responsibility while assuring that the needs of the members of the organization are balanced with meeting the needs of the institution. It provides an avenue for the construction and sharing of knowledge that is key in the success of contemporary organizations.

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APPENDIX A

Information Letter
Request for Participants

As you all know, I am currently a student at the University of Alberta. After completing my coursework it is now time to begin the research phase of my degree. Over the past two years, I have become very interested in the potential of action research as a research methodology and as an operational tool for building knowledge in post-secondary institutions. To explore this further, I am proposing an action research project that could provide benefit to the individuals involved as co-researchers, to me as a graduate student, and to the College as it develops new approaches in leadership and learning.

The benefits to the participant researchers could include (depending on the individual):

- A better understanding of the process of action research and its theoretical base.
- The opportunity to work with 3 or 4 peers on a joint project
- A better understanding of the culture and organizational processes of the college
- The opportunity to contribute toward organizational knowledge and process improvement
- Enhanced leadership skills—especially those related to project organization and peer supervision
- The opportunity to publish findings as a co-researcher.

Because a truly participative action research project develops as the researchers negotiate their common understanding and their common goals for the project, it is difficult for me to predict the precise outcome of the project. I would, however, like to pursue the area of peer supervision as it relates to leadership development and the organizational processes of developmental planning for faculty. This relates directly to the work being done by LEAD and the Professional Standards Committee so the project is both timely and consistent with other developments at the College.

I am looking for 3 or 4 individuals who have some assigned leadership role at RDC (chairs are ideal). I would hope to begin the process with an initial meeting to provide preliminary information and to answer any questions that individuals may have about the project. I hope to proceed using the following schedule although this would have to be agreed upon by the co-researchers:

- January 27 4:00 pm. Initial meeting for potential participants
- May 2. First meeting and workshop
- May-June. Establishment of initial action research cycle and plan for implementation
- September-December. Implementation of project and final analysis by project team.

I estimate that our initial phases will take 3 or 4 meetings in the May to June period and 3 or 4 during the September to December period. Depending on the issues that arise, there may have to be follow-up interviews with each participant that would take place in January 2004 for the purpose of my dissertation.

If you have any questions please feel free to call or email:

Phone: 3295
Email: gerry.paradis@rdc.ab.ca

APPENDIX B

Consent Letter

January 9, 2004

Dear potential participant researcher:

I am inviting you to become a participant researcher in an action research project designed to explore the design and application of a peer supervision process for our college. This will involve an action research process that will also consider the applicability of action research as a leadership process and as a change mechanism in the college. As a participant researcher, you will be involved in designing the research project, in reviewing the results and in proposing additional action plans. My research will respond to the following key questions:

1. What new approaches to the supervisory process can be constructed participatively by those in assigned positions of power?
2. From the perspective of the participant researchers, what are the benefits and drawbacks of action research in developing and implementing new administrative processes?

I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Policy Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and this project is designed to gather data for a dissertation.

As a participant researcher, you will meet as a team to consider the context of the research project, consider plans for action and review the actions taken. Each meeting will be recorded through a means agreed to by the group and an analysis of the data will be provided to the next meeting so that the interpretations can be validated by the members of the group and so that the analysis can inform the next discussions of the group. Other means of data collection will be explored such as employing a note-taker, journaling, and research logs. I will interview each participant researcher separately at the start of the project and after it concludes. Data from these interviews will be shared with each interviewee to verify the accuracy of the information.

The meetings will not have time limits except those agreed upon by the group. The interviews will be about one hour long. All data will be held confidentially and any note-takers, transcribers, or auditors will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. If audio or video tapes are employed, they will be stored securely for one year and then erased following completion of the dissertation and transcripts will be destroyed after being held for five years. Disclosure of data, interpretations, and conclusions will be discussed and agreed upon by the research group.

As a participant researcher you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. If you should withdraw, any data that was collected pertaining specifically to you will be removed from the data base and will not be included in the study. Since this study will take place in our own organization, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, every effort will be made to maintain some level of anonymity in reporting the data, and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. Disclosure will be discussed and agreed upon by the research group prior to any publication of results so that a thorough assessment of risk to the participants is carried out.

This research will be used to write my dissertation and could be used in subsequent research articles, conference presentations, or other public disclosure as planned by the research group. Data for all these uses will be subject to the conditions outlined in this letter.

If you have any concerns regarding this letter of consent or any other issues that arise during the conduct of this research project, please do not hesitate to contact any of the individuals named below:

Researcher: Gerald Paradis
Phone: (403) 343-8512
Email: gdparadis@shaw.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Tara Fenwick
Asst. Professor, Education Policy Studies
University of Alberta
Phone: (780) 492-4879
Email: tara.fenwick@ualberta.ca

Policy Studies Graduate Coordinator:
Dr. Gerry Taylor
Professor &Associate Chair/Graduate Coord
Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta
Phone: 492-3681
E-mail: epscoord@ualberta.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Faculties of Education and Extension at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at (780) 492-3751."

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Gerry Paradis

Consent

I, ______________________, consent to participate in this research project under the conditions specified in this letter. My signature below confirms that I willingly make this declaration and that I am fully informed of the conditions under which I will participate.

________________________________ ____________________
Signature Date

APPENDIX C

Sample Interview Questions

Participant researchers will be interviewed independently following the first research group meeting and again at the end of the research project. Each participant will be reminded that they are not required to answer all the questions but that their participation is valued in the conduct of the research. They will also be advised that their responses will remain anonymous. The interviews will be conducted in a conversational manner and the precise wording and order of the questions may vary with each interview. The interviews will be taped and transcribed. The questions listed below are sample questions only. Other questions may arise during the course of the interview so that the information can be probed to gain more clear understanding.

Questions for interview 1:

1. Now that you have had time to read the research proposal and reflect on our first discussion as a research group, please describe how your understanding of this project has changed since you volunteered?
    a. What do you expect to learn from your involvement in this project?
    b. What do you expect could result from our work in this project?
2. How could action research be used to catalyze change in our college? How could it be used in your department?
3. Do you anticipate any difficulties arising during this project? If so, what are they?
4. What do you believe that you will contribute to this project?
5. What does the term college culture mean to you?
    a. What aspects of our college culture do you feel will constrain progress in this research project?
    b. What aspects of our college culture do you feel will support progress in this research project?
6. Do you feel that my position as a dean at our college will affect the outcomes of this project.
    a. Do you expect that I will have disproportional influence in the research group? Please explain.
    b. Will you feel constrained in any way by my presence in this group? Please explain.
7. Have you been involved in peer review at our college?
    a. If so, what has been your involvement in peer review?
    b. How has that involvement been useful to you?
    c. How has that involvement been useful to the college?
    d. How has that involvement been useful to the peers that you reviewed?
8. How do you feel about the concepts of distributed leadership and shared responsibility as it applies to our organization?
    a. Probe for distributed leadership or share responsibility if not mentioned.
    b. Does action research hold any potential for promoting these concepts?
9. Do you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like to add?

Questions for interview 2 following completion of the project:

1. Now that you have been involved with this research project for the past 8 months, please describe how your understanding of this project has changed since we started.
    a. What have you learned from your involvement in this project?

    b. What do you expect could result from our work in this project?
    c. Would you feel comfortable in using action research in your work as a leader in our college? Please give examples.
2. How could action research be used to catalyze change in our college?
3. Did you experience any difficulties during this project? If so, what were they?
4. Do you believe that you contributed as an equal participant in this research group?
    a. If so, please describe your contributions.
    b. If not, what prevented you from becoming an equal participant? How did you feel about that?
5. Has your concept of college culture changed since we began this project? In what way?
    a. What aspects of our college culture do you feel constrained progress in this research project?
    b. What aspects of our college culture do you feel supported progress in this research project?
6. Do you feel that my position as a dean at our college affected the outcomes of this project.
    a. Did I have disproportional influence in the research group? Please explain.
    b. Did you feel constrained in any way by my presence in this group? Please explain.
7. Would it be reasonable for a senior administrator to use this process in his/her practice of management or leadership?
    a. If yes, please describe how it might be used.
    b. If not, why not?
8. Has this project had an impact on the process of peer supervision at our college?
    a. If so, what is the impact?
    b. If not, why not?
    c. Could there be some impact in the future?
    d. What steps would we take to further impact the application of peer supervision at our college?
9. How do you feel about the concepts of distributed leadership and shared responsibility as it applies to our organization?
    a. Does action research hold any potential for promoting these concepts?
    b. Do you feel that you have gained confidence in your ability to exert leadership in our college as a result of this project?
10. Please describe the ways that we could have approached this project differently that would have improved the results?
    a. For you?
    b. For your department?
    c. For our college?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

A New Approach for Probationary and Sessional Evaluation
A Proposal from the Chair Research Group

Background

An action research group comprised of five [College] chairs and one administrator (graduate student) has met since last spring to discuss issues related to the leadership/supervision role of chairs. Through our discussions, we have explored issues related to conflicting role expectations of chairs particularly in the areas of leadership and supervision. In our analysis, we have tried to characterize the cultures of the College and the processes that are currently in place for evaluation.

Current Issues

- Chairs are often conflicted between their roles as peers with fellow faculty members, coaches and mentors with new faculty members, consultants in peer evaluation, and supervisors of part time faculty.
- The feedback that is provided in the faculty evaluations of the members of their departments is often carefully worded so as to avoid serious conflict and thus is not always as forthright as necessary.
- Because deans are required to provide summative assessment of instructor performance on such limited feedback, there seems to be a gap in the authenticity of the process.
- Chairs are much closer to the action in terms of providing evaluation but do not feel that they have enough information upon which they can base a fair assessment of their peers.
- Chairs are concerned about the long-term impact of their activities in evaluation. They realize that they will not be chairs forever and that they have to maintain reasonable collegial relationships with their peers.

Proposed Probationary Assessment Process

We propose the following process for the probationary and sessional evaluations. Because sessional positions can also become continuing positions with substantial reduction in the formal probationary period, they should be included in this process. The proposal is based on the following principles:

- Probationary and sessional faculty members must be responsible for their own evaluations and for their own development plans.
- Chairs must take an active role in this process in order to provide leadership to their program areas and in order to promote collegial relationships among their peers.
- Chairs are critical to the process of evaluation because of the level of knowledge that they possess both about the context of their activities and about the activities of the new faculty members.
- In order for the evaluation of probationary faculty to be both valid and useful, it must be based on substantial contact between the chair and the faculty member and it must focus on professional development.
- In order to take best advantage of all three years of the probationary period, we must reduce the redundancy of the current process and eliminate the routine nature of the evaluation activities. Currently, all evaluation packages have identical formats and the same sources of feedback.

First Year

- The first year of probation is a year of mentorship and coaching by the chair. This would involve observations of classes, discussions about the classes, and discussion about teaching materials. The new faculty member is asked to observe exemplary instructors with debriefing by the chair.
- Student feedback is provided through the new and improved SFI and the results will be provided to the dean in the usual way. The chair will discuss the feedback with the instructor.
- Peer observations are documented by the probationary faculty member during the follow-up discussion with the observer. Each peer review results in a plan to address specific recommendations for improvement. Both the observed and observer sign the report to validate the information.
- The end of the first year results in a mentorship report where the chair simply describes the activities of the mentorship and the nature of the self-reflective practice of the probationary member. No evaluative statements are made.
- The Chair meets with the probationary member and the dean to discuss the mentorship year.
- The dean completes a summative assessment form that simply states whether or not the probation should continue.

Second Year

- The second year begins with the probationary faculty member writing a developmental plan based on the activities of the first year, the mentorship report of the chair, the discussion with the dean and the competency statements from the policy on evaluation.
- Peer observations, SFIs, and a wide variety of alternative methods for evaluation are incorporated in the plan which is approved by the dean. The focus is on self-reflective practice and professional development.
- The Chair takes on a more evaluative role in this second year and reports from the chair are more clearly evaluative in nature.
- The faculty member completes a self-evaluation report based on the developmental plan that was agreed to at the beginning of the year.
- The Chair is asked to review the package and provide a statement of evaluation. A recommendation for continuation is included.

Third Year

- This last year of probation is the same as the current formal process except that only one report is produced in preparation for the continuous appointment hearing. This includes the evaluations for the current year and the retrospective report.
- The Chair provides a recommendation for continuous appointment as does the dean.